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WHY WON'T BIDEN SAY 'ABORTION'?

THE BEAUTIFUL *Kinky* Kazumi

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A Night on the Boardwalk with Hilfiger and the Hadids

A recap of Tommy Hilfiger and Gigi Hadid's spring 2017 line in Venice Beach, California, whose highlights included Fergie, Lady Gaga, Bella Hadid and Kris Jenner

BY **LIZ SUMAN** PHOTO BY **SHUTTERSTOCK**

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Tommy Hilfiger and Gigi Hadid hit the misty streets of Venice Beach last night to debut their Spring 2017 capsule collection, and they brought a private jet full of Victoria's Secret models and an entire amusement park along with them.

Some 3,000 fans, buyers, supermodels and members of the press Ubered or limoed to L.A.'s West Side on Wednesday for a trip to Tommyland, a celebration of the second installment of Tommy Hilfiger and Gigi Hadid's fashion collaboration, aptly titled Tommy x Gigi.

Along with a live runway show and a modernized slice of 1950s Americana in the form of a full-on amusement park complete with a Kamikaze, Ferris wheel and giant bean bag slide, highlights of the Coachella-meets-Abbott Kinney carnival (the West Coast follow-up to Hilfiger and Hadid's similarly-themed New York Fashion Week event at South Street Seaport in September) included a performance by a hot pants-clad Fergie set against a backdrop of graffiti murals and light installations. Flocks of roller skaters, roving fire performers and acrobats, multiple pop-up shops and a Smorgasborg-curated collection of food trucks filled out the scene.

In addition to swarms of carefully dressed millennials and fashion blogeratti, the founding father of American menswear and Mattel's newest plastic ambassador rallied an entourage of A-list influencers to help christen their latest joint venture. The crowd of well-wishers included Bella Hadid, Kris Jenner, Laura Dern, Rachel Zoe, Kaia Gerber and Lada Gaga—proving that there's no more American follow-up to a headlining Super Bowl performance than a trip to the beach with Tommy Hilfiger.

Gigi opened and closed the see-now-buy-now show and was joined on the outdoor catwalk by her newly Victoria's Secret Angel-minted sister Bella and fellow models and BFFs Joan Smalls, Hailey Baldwin, Stella Maxwell, Devon Windsor, Stella Maxwell, Alanna Arrington and Blanca Padilla. Many of them commuted to the event on a heavily Instagrammed-ride on Hilfiger's private jet, Air Tommy.

A large number of the models in or at the show are part of a second generation cast of 1990s supermodel and Hollywood royalty: Gerber is the daughter of Cindy Crawford; Gigi and Bella are the daughters of Dutch American model Yolanda Hadid; Hailey Baldwin's dad is Stephen; Sofia Richie is the daughter of Lionel and half-sister of Nicole and the list goes on. How long Tommy's girls will continue to dominate the millennial world of fashion with more wholesome versions of the '90s, only time will tell.

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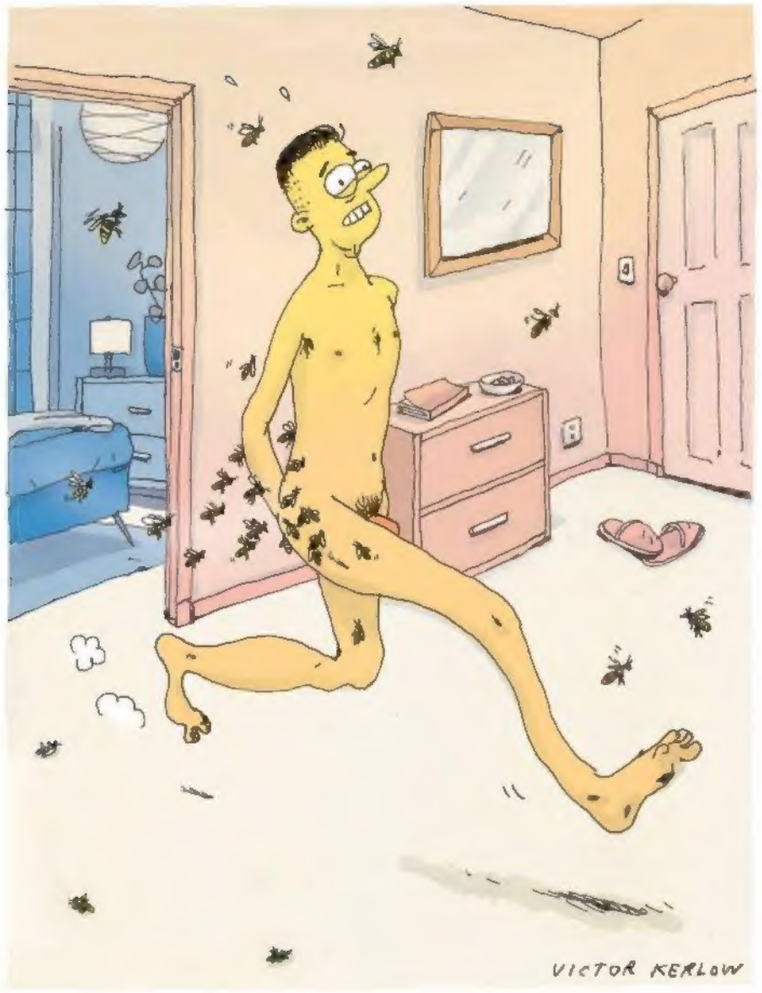
Courtesy Liz Suman

Courtesy Gülla Helman

Playboy Cartoon *of the Week*

Cartoonist Victor Kerlow details a buzzy bedroom blunder



"I thought you said anal beads!"

Playboy Cartoon *of the Week*

Cartoonist Tom Toro reimagines a classic tale of romance

"Your kiss was well-aimed, Princess."

PLAYMATE

ALI

Instagram **@funkier_buddha**

MUA **Andrew Ybarra**

PLAYMATE

PLAYMATE

Tell us a little about yourself. I am a Registered Nurse by trade but I'm currently in school for my Doctorates and Ph.D. in Integrative Medicine. I am also in school to be a pilot, and despite my busy schedule, I travel often.

What do you enjoy most about what you do? Having the opportunity to work in research and treatment development during a global pandemic on a wildly infamous virus. Working on the frontlines of covid and behind the scenes of treatment, development has been one of the most rewarding and terrifying experiences I've had.

What is your greatest life achievement thus far? I started college when I was 15 and graduated with my Associates in Science before any of the friends my age had graduated high school. I moved out of my parents' house at 17 and moved to London with my best friend at 18. Unfortunately, it's been a steady decline of events since. Sorry, dad.

What would you say is your best feature? The shape of my eyes. When I was younger, I realized the power of eye contact and I used to think I could hypnotize people. Looking back, I realize I didn't, people were probably just looking at me crazy. Although I do think to this day, I could hypnotize a few people here and there. If you stare long enough people tend to do what you ask or begin to walk away briskly. I'm still working out the kinks.

What makes you feel sexy? Freedom! I grew up in a very strict household and never left the house until I moved out. Then I spent many years in relationships. I never knew what freedom felt like until recently. It's liberating and sexy and exciting! I am not ready for someone to take that away from me.

What advice would you give to women aspiring to get into modeling? Own your features. I'd be lying if I said I didn't sometimes wish for a better jawline, a smaller nose, or a bigger bum; but eventually, you learn those different qualities about you are what makes you, you. And you were meant to stand out. I want my kids to know what their mother's natural body looks like.

Favorite Shoot Location? Any travel destination is a treat, but I love a good waterfall, who doesn't!

Do you prefer kissing or cuddling? Cuddle puddles all day please. I am a very physically affectionate person and I want to hold and to be held as much as humanly possible.

What are you really good at? I am really good at memorizing random facts that will serve you absolutely no good in the real world.

What is one thing people may be surprised to find out about you? I overthink everything. Forgot what I said to you this morning? Don't worry I've recounted the entire moment frame by frame an infinitesimal number of times. I've also created multiple alternative scenarios I would have preferred to occur rather than our interaction.

Do you have a catchphrase? Two words, "character building." If I ever have a bad experience, a rough day, or a tough time, I simply dismiss it as: character building. Someone ran over your cat. Character building. Your fridge guy murdered your bird with no explanation and still didn't fix your fridge? Character building, -oddly specific but actually happened.

What is your favorite word in any language and what does it mean? Ethereal, my sister and best friend used this word to describe me and although I don't believe them; it has become my favorite word. This is an English word meaning otherworldly, heavenly.

PLAYMATE

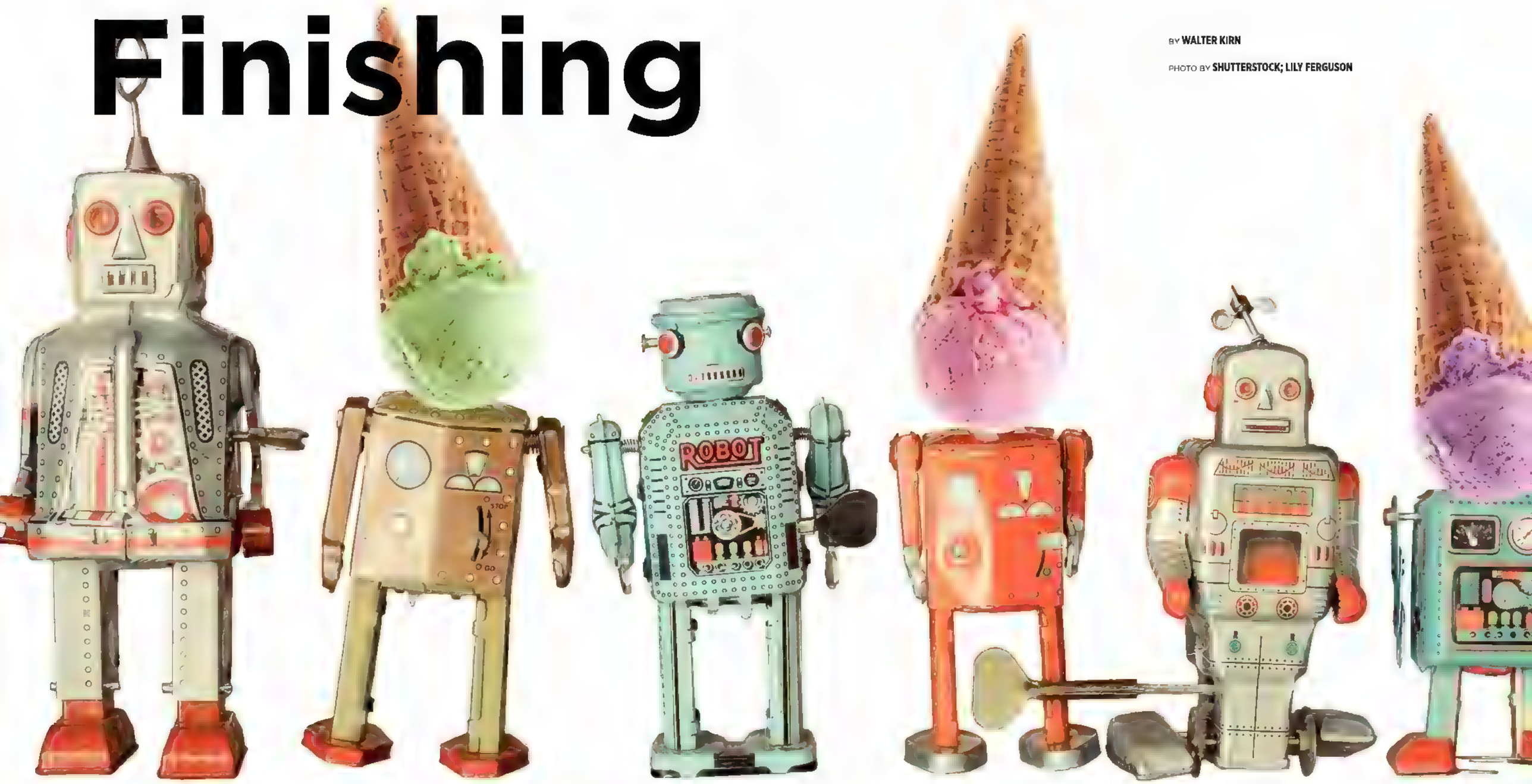
Any last words you would like to share with the readers? If you must react at all, react to someone's intentions, not their actions

Playboy Fiction

Finishing

BY **WALTER KIRN**

PHOTO BY **SHUTTERSTOCK; LILY FERGUSON**



Serv.ng ice cream to sunburned young families was the first job that Tyson Millner lost to a machine. It was shaped like a fat, upright lobster, and had five arms. It was there one morning behind the counter, illuminated by a special track light, when he showed up for his shift. Mrs Huggard, his boss, the shop's owner, called it "Lenny" after a character in a book she loved. It had some remarkable abilities. It could guess people's orders before they placed them based on what they'd ordered in the past and was programmed to tease them with corny quips. If a girl liked pecans on her sundaes, it might say, retrieving her name from its perfect memory, "You're nuts for nuts, Luanne!" Or, if she wanted bananas, "You've gone bananas!" These wisecracks never failed to bring on squeals, even from children who'd heard them many times.

A delicious tale of robots, sex and ice cream

Also thrilling to them was Lenny's physical manner, which was that of an overburdened juggler continually on the verge of flubbing up. Simulating rising panic, its articulated, claw-tipped arms would speed up crazily, threatening disaster, as they dispensed candy sprinkles and caramel sauce, blended milk shakes and built top-heavy cones that it pretended were too tall to hold and yet, despite much mock bobbling, never dropped.

Tyson too found Lenny charming—at first. They were partners, the way he saw it, a comic duo. He helped with tasks that Lenny couldn't manage, such as clearing clogged syrup spouts, handling paper money (Lenny could only process cards) and topping off sundaes with a glossy cherry perched on a frilly squirt of canned whipped cream. This cherry business, with Tyson at the ready, suspending the piece of fruit above the bowl as fake-fumbling Lenny assembled the confection, grew into their most popular routine. Another act that delighted the little ones consisted of Tyson standing at Lenny's "shoulder" watching his movements and wielding a small wrench as though prepared to swoop in and readjust him, or maybe deactivate him, should he screw up. But Lenny never screwed up. In fact, he kept improving, endowed by his manufacturer with the ability to observe and refine his own behavior. Someday he might even learn to place a cherry, dimpling it into the cream so it stayed put.

Within a few weeks of Lenny's installation, traffic at the shop had nearly doubled, and Tyson decided to ask a second time for the raise he'd been expecting. His wage, he'd understood when he was hired, was preliminary, probationary, and supposed to go up automatically after a month or two. When this didn't happen, Tyson started grousing about unforeseen expenses in his life, from the need to replace the bald tires on his truck to a surge in the price of Clarifex, a drug that calmed his raging acne. Mrs. Huggard responded with grumbles of her own. A pack rat had died in a drainpipe in the wall of the apartment building she owned next door, causing a leak that soaked into the Sheetrock and spawned a bloom of toxic mold. She had to hire a licensed abatement firm at over R2,750.00 an hour. But even worse, she let him know, tourism was down throughout the region thanks to hysterical media reports concerning a rare but deadly tick-borne virus local to southern Utah's red rock hills. Sensitive to her troubles, Tyson backed off, but when Lenny appeared and worked his miracle, attracting new customers from throughout the area even as fall approached and the weather cooled, he decided his demands were not unreasonable.

He approached his boss in her office behind the shop at the end of a Thursday, the day she did her books. Surrounded by her collection of witty mugs—Same Old Shit, Different Day; The Best Man for the Job Is Usually a Woman; etc.—she was filling out a spreadsheet on her computer. Mrs. Huggard had a bitter streak. The rumor was she'd been the longtime mistress of a married U.S. congressman who'd found religion during a close election and bought her silence with a large lump sum that she'd used to start the shop. To Tyson, she looked like a loving soul defeated, a merry spirit curdled by worldly hurts. Her gray-green eyes were permanently narrowed and her hair was a perfect blonde fury, set and sprayed, rigid enough to cage a little bird. She lived in the top rear unit of her building, where Tyson had once helped a mover deliver a dryer. Her furniture was brown leather, like a man's, and through the open doorway of her bedroom he glimpsed an old poster of a movie cowboy blasting away with a lever-action rifle. The only touch of softness in the place was an odd little altar on a window seat consisting of candles and amethysts and sage leaves arranged in a crescent around a bright gold coin. "Prosperity magic," she answered when he asked. "The sun streams in and activates a vortex."

Tyson stood by her desk and made his pitch while she leaned back in her new hydraulic chair, her elbows resting on its arms and her fingertips in a steeple under her chin. He reminded her of the promises she made when she hired him off an online bulletin board maintained by a state-run service for at-risk teens, Youth Horizons, a boot-camp-like program in the desert that he'd been sentenced to by a lady judge after calling in a bomb threat to his school on a day when he couldn't bear for his few friends to see the volcanic pimples on his face, was the cruelest sum

Tyson had been consoled this way before, mostly by church girls, those experts at snaky praise.

mer of his life. On the very first night a camp mate snatched his Ritalin, forcing him to undergo withdrawal while enduring a cycle of freezing predawn showers, barefoot five-mile runs, marathon computer-coding classes and trust-building leaps from a tower behind the barracks into other campers' outstretched arms. The counselors told them the idea was to break them down and then rebuild them, but the program ended before phase two was done.

"You told me you'd bump me up after a month," he said. "I just had to prove to you I didn't steal. Well, I didn't. I haven't."

"You're reformed."

"I'm honest and punctual, is what I am."

"Not to mention immaculately groomed."

Tyson's right hand floated up and touched his forehead, a reflex when someone mentioned his appearance.

"Don't pick," she said. "It won't heal if you keep picking. And that would be a shame, because you're handsome. Fundamentally. Under all the rough stuff."

Tyson had been consoled this way before, mostly by church girls, those experts at snaky praise. Their compliments, if you took them in, settled inside your system like spoiled food, producing pangs and churns and aches. It was better to be called ugly and bleed cleanly. That could be bandaged, dealt with by first aid.

Tyson pressed ahead. In case Mrs. Huggard hadn't listened last time, he described his circumstances to her. His landlord, his aunt, was on mobile dialysis, with no other income besides the rent he paid her. As a Mormon, one-tenth of his income was the Church's. Most important, though, he was the sole responsible male in the life of a young single mother, his cousin Kylee, whose three-year-old son had developmental challenges that called for psychology checkups in Salt Lake City and kept her from working outside the home. He didn't support his cousin—she got church welfare—but his occasional loans and gifts bridged her worst shortfalls and wardrobe needs, letting her focus on being a good mom.

"That's all deeply stirring," Mrs. Huggard said, "but your pay should reflect your performance, not your problems. The truth is, it's Lenny who deserves a raise."

"He can't even put the cherries on," said Tyson.

"Maybe we don't need cherries. Do people eat them?"

"They're the finishing touch. They're traditional."

"They're wasteful. Nobody eats them. I see them in the trash."

"They're expected," said Tyson.

"They're barbershop quartets. Used to seem cheerful. No one quite knows why."

Before Tyson could argue his point further, Mrs. Huggard cut his schedule. She informed him that the shop would close on Mondays so Lenny could be serviced, tuned and cleaned by the company she leased him from. She suggested that Tyson, if he were "future positive," might want to learn to perform such work himself. She offered to ask the company's mobile tech team, which was based in Las Vegas and worked out of a van equipped with costly electronic tools, to let him stop in and observe its work on Mondays. He could think of it as an unpaid internship.

"I don't think so. No interest," said Tyson. He loathed computers. He even disliked his phone. Youth Horizons had drilled him in a gospel of tripling and quadrupling opportunities for anyone able to size a digital photo or group all his passwords under one super password, but then why were the people who taught these skills so grim? Why were they herding delinquents through the desert, not cruising eight miles above it wearing headphones? And this was the sick part: According to one counselor, the day was approaching when most computer work would be performed by other computers. Then what? It's why when Kylee felt all cooped up that one time and begged him to pay for an online graphic design course, he bought her a stationary bike instead.

"I ought to go back and close up and clear the till," he said. "I left him all alone in there."

Mrs. Huggard raised an index finger as if inviting him to witness something. She swiveled around in her chair and tapped her keyboard, calling up a screen on her big desktop that showed a split view from the security cameras: the front door on the right, the counter on the left. The door had been shut, its latching crossbar lowered and its one-way reflective sun curtain pulled down. But that was not the sight that startled Tyson. Standing at the counter near the cash drawer and casting a crisp dark shadow on the white tiles, Lenny was rapidly counting the day's take and stacking the bills and coins with all five claws.

"You know how he mastered that?" Mrs. Huggard said.

Tyson didn't, and wasn't about to guess.

"By patient observation. By watching you."

He fasted on Sunday. He fasted once a month on the schedule set down by the Church, the chief source of structure in his life since Youth Horizons had broken him down and only partially rebuilt him. His Mormon faith confused him for the most part, particularly its ideas about the afterlife, when risen souls would inherit their own planets and reign over them as God reigns over ours, but there was one doctrine that made sense to him: pre-existence. Before we were born, according to this teaching, we chose our lives to come, from the people who would become our friends and families to the most crucial challenges we'd face. That's why no problems on earth were insurmountable, we'd already solved them in our prior state. The trick was retrieving these answers through the veil, which was where fasting came in. It quickened thought.

Like most businesses in Cedar City, the ice cream shop was closed on Sundays, but Tyson felt prompted to drive there after church on his way to Kylee's place, where he'd promised to watch his nephew while she cleaned. He parked his truck across the street and watched the sunshine baste the wide front window. He pictured Lenny locked in the back room, shrouded in the bluish plastic sheet that shielded him

from dust. Tyson wished he could spend some time alone with him, if only so they could banter about nothing using the goofy scripts in Lenny's memory. "Oh fudge, we're out of chocolate!" "Willya grab some vanilla from the chilla?" At work, with Mrs. Huggard spying on them through the security portal on her desktop, they only pretended to have fun, but underneath the mood was pressured, tense. It led to mistakes, at least on Tyson's part. Just yesterday he'd dumped a tall parfait that Lenny had spent five minutes layering, bringing tears to the eyes of a patient birthday girl, who turned to her father and wailed, "My special treat!" Lenny promptly started a new parfait, but when it came time to hand it off to Tyson so he could light the pink candle on the top while singing "Happy Birthday," her father barged in and grabbed it straight from Lenny.

As Tyson sat parked in his truck he saw a cop car nose out of an alley onto Smith Street and turn in his direction, moving slowly. He recognized the officer, a man who'd given him trouble in the past, pulling him over for nothing, just to "chat," no doubt aware of Tyson's tainted status as a level six offender. Though his stunt at Youth Horizons had automatically wiped his record when he'd turned 18 last winter, the authorities seemed determined to toy with him, perhaps still angry about the stir he'd caused by making the bomb threat in a foreign accent. They tracked him to his aunt's within 10 minutes, panicking neighbors up and down the block by thundering in in an armored SUV, wearing black paramilitary style jumpsuits and brandishing laser-scoped long guns, not stubby sidearms. His aunt, unaware of the sneaky call he'd placed, was docked with her mobile dialysis machine when the killer elite burst through the door. She fainted in her lounge chair. Tyson, wrapped in a towel, fresh from the shower, was handcuffed in minus seven seconds, his shoulders cranked back in their sockets, about to pop. Worse, the towel had fallen to his ankles and the commotion had made his penis hard, a condition he tried to will away but couldn't.

Finding work after all of that had not been simple. He didn't want to have to search again.

The police car rolled past and Tyson drove away, obeying the speed limit, signaling his turns. He entered Kylee's subdivision, a hive of noodle-shaped streets and cul-de-sacs lined by desert tan three story houses whose residents couldn't cover their basic monthlies, forcing a lot of them to rent rooms to strangers. Kylee lived in a basement whose owner had set it up as a huge media room originally, with sectional sofas and a vast TV that covered one wall like a window into hell. Tyson found her there watching a movie with little Taylor, who was standing

The authorities were perhaps still angry about the stir he'd caused by making a bomb threat.

enclosed in a waist-high plastic cart that scooted around on gritty, scratchy wheels and featured various toys on springy stalks, including a dangling yellow microphone. The gadget worked. It amplified his voice, filling the room with booming babbles that Kylee, a nervous type, guiltily interpreted as orders.

"I'm getting your Cheerios. Promise. Hang on," she said.

Tyson said, "Go do your laundry. Let me have him." His theory of Taylor was that his talk was nonsense, just bubbles of sound-feeling bursting in the air, meaning Kylee was scrambling his progress toward working speech by attaching specific rewards to random blabs.

"He's trying to tell us he wants a snack," said Kylee.

"He's got a snack. What's that?" Tyson pointed to the gray bologna strips strewn on a tray that clipped onto the cart. "He's fine. Do your wash. We're going to read a book."

"He tore all the pages out. He wrecked his book."

"Kids need multiple books. That's pathetic. One book? That's wrong."

"We live a sad life in our enormous basement."

"I'll make up a story for him. Go away." This was why he hadn't moved away to work in Salt Lake or Las Vegas, the way his friends had. There was a mind at stake. A tiny mind.

The story he told tumbled out already formed, a tale of deception and enchantment that must have been a product of his fast, since nothing about it seemed to come from him, he wondered if he'd seen it in a movie or had it read to him by a babysitter, perhaps that old Basque lady who'd nursed his aunt. The setting was a gloomy mountain cavern, the throne room of a lonesome queen who'd plucked out her own eyes as a young maiden after glimpsing the man she loved passionately kissing her lovely sister. In her court were two elves that competed for her favor by fashioning elaborate jeweled crowns whose beauty the queen could only take on faith, by listening to the elves' descriptions of them. The cleverer elf, who was also the lazy one, eventually realized that the crowns themselves—whose brilliant gemstones could be obtained only by digging in a deep and narrow mine—were unimportant compared to the fine words required to rouse the queen's imagination. Instead of toiling in the far off mine, he crafted his crowns from homely pebbles and fixed his attention on learning fancy speech. This trickery enraged the second elf. He responded by digging deeper into the mine in search of brighter, larger gems, which he described to the queen in honest terms, along with the splendid crowns he made from them. This contest went on for many years, the clever elf growing grander in his language, the simple elf weakening from his taxing labors. Finally, on her deathbed, the queen announced that her kingdom would pass to the greater of the two craftsmen, but rather than judge the matter herself, she would call upon her chief wizard, whose eyes were keen, to rank their workmanship. The simple elf rejoiced on hearing this, confident in his achievements, while the clever elf panicked and, fearing the wizard's approach, raised his fists and beat the simple elf, who died in the battle, too weary to fight back.

"A curse on you," came the voice of the wise wizard, who'd witnessed the conflict while floating in the air. "You need not have slain the poor creature, for you, my elf, were truly the best jeweler. Your rival turned rubies into crowns, but you, with your tongue, turned gravel into rubies."

Tyson's nephew, hot and small and damp, had curled up against him and gone to sleep. Tyson realized he'd told the story with his eyes closed, bobbing along in a cloudy purple dreamscape. When he opened his eyes and reentered the hard world, he smelled a pizza baking, cheese and sausage, and a spike of pure animal hunger drenched his mouth. He could eat now, the fast had succeeded. He'd broken through. He knew what to do. Not precisely, not in detail, but as a direction, a course across a map.

"If you'd just asked me, dummy," Kylee said after he'd presented his ideas, "I would have told you the same thing. The way you describe this, it's your only move."

But a vision was so much better than advice.

According to the videos and websites that Tyson studied after work that week, gaining control of a woman, seducing her, had little to do with gentleness and kindness. Though women admired these qualities in theory, their real-life behavior, true pickup artists knew, revealed a preference for boastful, taunting jerks. Appearance? Attractiveness? Neither was essential. What mattered was keeping her doubtful and off balance. What worked was leverage, and what was leverage? Fear.

Tyson's first move with Mrs. Huggard was to start calling her "Carol" around the shop. She didn't correct him, though he could see it rocked her; her hands went right to her body every time, smoothing her shirt or the hips of her brown slacks. The name seemed to put them on a different footing, elevating his and dropping hers, even, in some way, narrowing their age gap. She was 40, give or take a year. Tyson learned this by turning off the soft rock radio station that played during work hours, per her standing order, and switching to an urban station. "They're depressing, those 1960s songs," he said. "All that high warbling makes me want to die. Sorry you had to grow up with that."

"I didn't. That last song—performed by the gifted Whitney Houston, if pop culture history interests you, at all—was the number one hit in 1993, my senior year in high school."

"Back in some farm state, you told me. Indiana?"

"Go Hoosiers!" Lenny barked, idling off to the side near the steel sink. His updated customer service software plug-in cross-referenced the names of states and cities with a list of pro and college sports teams. Tourists loved it. They couldn't get enough. They ran down long rosters of places, testing him.

"Minnesota," Mrs. Huggard said.

"Go Twins. Go Vikings."

"Question for you, Carol," Tyson said. "And I need you to answer honestly. And think." He was leaning against the freezer, ankles crossed, his thumbs hooked inside the cloth belt that cinched his apron. His shirtsleeves, which he'd always worn rolled down to hide the muddy amateur tattoo he'd given himself at Youth Horizons (Scorpio the scorpion, his sun sign, inside a ring of fire), were pushed up as far as they'd go, around his biceps. More skin showed inside his open collar, which also revealed a nickel chain formed from hammered, medieval looking links. He'd bought it at a fair but never worn it, concerned that it might draw attention to the war zone of pitted pink scars on his throat and lower jaw. The pickup videos allayed this qualm. Concealing your flaws was a weak, evasive move that conveyed degraded mating status to the primal female brain. The power move, which required a rewiring of the shame-warped modern male nervous system, was to showcase your flaws, to stick them right up front.

"If I'm buying my girlfriend a hot new dress—on sale, that's important, a dress I can't take back—but I don't know her size and I don't want to ask her because asking would ruin the surprise, should I estimate down and risk

buying one too small. If so, I've blown a ton of money, it might be a sale dress, but it's still not cheap—or, to be safe, do I buy a larger size?"

"Except you don't have a girlfriend," said Mrs. Huggard. "Or has that changed? It might explain some things."

"The question is purely hypothetical."

"Let's pray I caught it all. It stretched."

"I'll gladly repeat it."

"Hush. I'm concentrating."

"I'm hoping you're storing this, Lenny," Tyson said. "This might be your first true insight into Carol. That question I asked her, you're going to see, is like an X-ray of her personality." Tyson was improvising here, patching a crack in his routine. In the video lessons, the model pick-up artist had a buddy, a so-called wingman, who pumped up his image and created drama. He might mention that they were late for a cool party, say, or whisper to the target woman that the pickup artist's desperate ex was lurking across the room.

"Too small," Mrs. Huggard said. She seemed distracted, she kept casting glances at the office door where she'd been headed when Tyson waylaid her. Or perhaps she was miffed that a mother with plump twin boys had paused at the window just then and peered inside—intently, with her hands shading her eyes—and then moved along in the way some parents did when they couldn't immediately spot the magical mechanized server they'd heard about.

"That tells me a lot about you. 'Too small,'" said Tyson, determined to play out the whole bit. It had taken him almost two hours to memorize because it called for different lines depending not only on the woman's answers but also on her posture and body language and whether she was alone or in a group. What's more, the script's potency wasn't in the words so much as in the gazes, gestures, breaths and other carefully planted hypnotic cues that led the woman, almost despite her will, to crave your attention and approval. Was it working with Carol? He'd soon see.

"What it tells me," he said, "is that you're vain. You worry about your looks, your weight, your shape. It also tells me you hope I like your shape. As my imaginary girlfriend, a role you unconsciously fell into there, you're eager for me, your imaginary boyfriend, to perceive you as slim and trim. You'd be crushed if I bought the larger size. You'd fear I thought that you were fat, particularly if you are a little fat."

"Brief time-out. Excuse me. People keep peeking in, then walking off." Mrs. Huggard double-clapped her hands, the signal for Lenny's motor to engage. "Command. Reposition. Front window, center right." Lenny rolled toward his post with a high, thin, oiled purr. After a series of sensor-driven stutters and minute telescopic height adjustments, he stopped in a panel of sunlight and faced the street, his arms folded up at all three articulations, his claws retracted and fully sheathed.

"Go on. Your psychology test," said Mrs. Huggard. She opened her stance some and cocked her head—good signs.

"That's it. That's all," said Tyson. "Though I was thinking. After work some night, maybe I could stop by at your apartment? To talk or whatever. Maybe watch a movie. You probably have great cable. I don't have any."

"A movie? At my place?"

"Or maybe not. Whatever. It was just an idea." Error. Error. Once you'd leaned in, you didn't lean back. You either withdrew all interest, baffling her, or leaned in further, going for the close. His eyes floated down to his shoes, another lapse, then wandered over to Lenny, so still, so solemn. Between tasks, between customers, he barely existed. Sometimes it was hard to remember he was the enemy.

"We could do it tonight if you're free. And up to it." Mrs. Huggard had opened her stance up even further, and soon, if the models were correct, she would touch her neck or breastbone. There: the breastbone. Tyson felt rushed. They'd skipped a step somehow, he wasn't sure which one, but the websites were clear: He should square his shoulders now and slacken his mouth a bit.

"If my friend is in town, I'll grab a little dope." Elongated stage pause. "Said Carol."

"This just got interesting."

"It always was. You just never seemed to notice."

"Carol said to Tyson."

"Said Mr. Millner."

The TV set, mounted on a wall, was small for this decade and miles from the couch, so they sat on a checked red blanket, picnic style, and watched the movie from the floor. She mixed cocktails in an empty saucepan and served them in mismatched stoneware mugs. He noticed her kitchen was pitifully equipped and that there was not a plant in the whole place, just a sand-filled clay flowerpot on a low bookcase with three foil pinwheels standing in the sand. She chain-smoked menthol cigarettes. The clouds she blew caught beams of blue TV light as she talked back to the movie, guessing characters' lines before they spoke them, ridiculing weak points in the plot and specifying the camera shots ("Zoom in," "Track back," "Fade out"). Her ashtray was a Coke can with Coke in it, lit butts inserted in the hole hissed and sizzled. She said money belonged in the bank, not in the house. She voted Republican, thought Democratic and lived Libertarian, she said, and then she explained what this meant; he didn't know politics. Their first physical contact was when she slapped his thigh, playfully but with stinging force, during a courtship scene she found absurd because the woman didn't seem to mind being pushed down by the man into a snowbank. He caught inklings of Mrs. Huggard, bursts of Carol and waves of a third being who contained them both and seemed to have whirled up out of a brass lamp. She wore gym shorts, a green, spangled blouse thing and no bra, her breasts bobbing like rubber bath toys. That she'd chosen to dwell and do business among Mormons made no sense to him, although maybe she lived for close

They sat on the bed beneath the cowboy poster, unzipping and unhooking. He wanted to thrill her.

getaways, quick-changes. She apo.og.zed for not finding any dope but said she'd brewed tea from cloves and magic mushrooms and spiked it with lemon vodka to make their drinks.

"So why this weird new you?" she said, asking him what he'd been meaning to ask her. "All shitty and cute and party with the boss?"

"I'm not sure I know. I'm 18. I try things out."

"When I was 18 things tried me out."

"Do you mean guys?"

"More like forces. Approaches. Ideas. Schools of thought." She drank some spiked tea and then peered into her cup as though she'd spotted a bug, a ha.r, her fortune. "You're right, though. They usually took the form of guys."

They sat. Nothing happened. They were just together. She poked a butt into the Coke can hole and up came a twisty braid of silver smoke that she blew on and separated into strands. It was possible that he loved her, or soon would. Her hair, with the spray gone, fell straight and smelled like pencils. He wanted to thrill her, suspecting few ever had. He didn't care about her thrilling him because calming down enough for that to happen seemed impossible tonight.

They sat on the bed beneath the cowboy poster, unzipping and unhooking. She took the lead but then he took it back, pushing her down. "You have instincts. Good," she said. He kneed her legs apart and used his hand on her, though possibly too scientifically at first, because she soon took control of it with her hand and moved it more crudely, with over twice the pressure, which made him feel rebuked. He bent down to kiss her but she turned her head, so he chewed on her ear. She seemed unmoved. She lifted his hand off and said, "We had a rhythm there but now it's like we're scrubbing a pot. Plan B." He interpreted this as a request to use his mouth, and indeed she reached behind his head and dug her nails into his scalp and drew him down.

But not all the way down, as though she'd reconsidered or detected a need to use the bathroom first. He went ahead anyway. Progress. Her motions started. The energy rose for a minute but then it leveled, and then he felt it running off somewhere—water overflowing from a sink. Her hand left his head and he felt her body torque. Glancing up, her saw her stretch an arm out and reach behind some books stacked on her nightstand. He resumed his task.

He heard a whining noise, a high speed grinding. It was steady at first but then turned choppy, pulsing. Between his lips and the surface he imagined as a melting scoop of French vanilla, something rigid intruded. It thrummed and buzzed.

"Stay down there. Be partners. Work with it," she said. "This isn't either-or, I want you both."

The device bumped his cheekbone, chattering his jaw. He moved his mouth aside to give it territory but it kept advancing and claiming more. Soon, the widening of time produced by the boozy mushroom tea became a scriptural chasm of agomes. Snapping to for a moment, he perceived that he was contributing nothing to the effort now—the locust invader had cast him to the side—yet she still seemed to want him down here, on her team. Teamwork. At Youth Horizons, it was everything. A man without a team, the program taught, was weak and doomed and to be pitied, but a young man alone was to be feared, he tended to grow into a menace. So get with it. Keep at it. Hum along. This droning misery can't go on forever. On Sunday mornings, certain hymns seemed endless, but then he'd turn the page and see that there was only one more verse. Knowing this, he sang more powerfully. Everyone did. They sang for their release.

"I scream, you scream," chants Lenny to the kids, who chant along with him as he moves his arms. He learned this by copying the boy. Then the boy stopped doing it. This is also what happened with the bananas. Lenny could slice them crosswise from the start, but only the boy knew how to slice them lengthwise. Then one day Lenny did it. Banana halves. The boy took his knife away and put it somewhere. Then the boy left too. Lenny began to practice with a smaller knife. He sliced bananas into halves, then he learned to slice them into thirds, and then to shave them thin. Banana curls. He learned on his own, by himself, without his teacher.

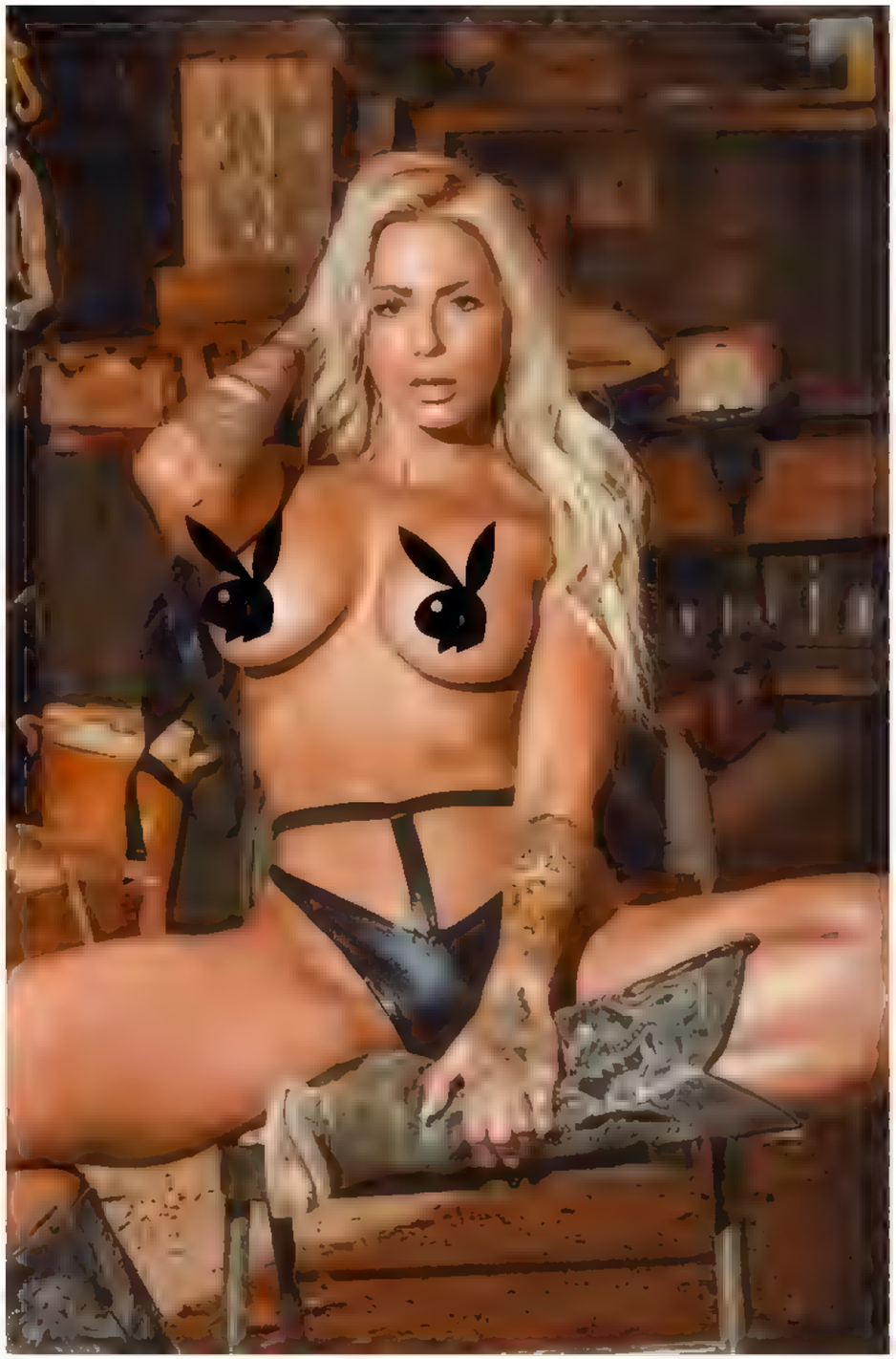
"We all scream for ice cream!"

The cherry boy

17673492

MELANIE
HOGEWONING

PLAYMATE



PLAYMATE

PLAYMATE

Tell us something surprising about you? I am a twin

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy? It was a dream come true. 've dreamt of be ng n p ayboy since saw my first magaz ne when was a tt e gir

What inspires you? honest y am just driven n genera and have a ist for ife My main n spiration is simply taking care of myse f by making time for myse f daily, but I a so have an incredib e circle and these men and women support and nspire me every day

Why did you choose to pursue a career in modeling? It is such a rewarding avenue t's been such a fun process and it's rea y he ped me discover myself on eve s never knew was capab e of

Who do you look up to in the modeling industry? always oved the OG ladies, Pame a Anderson, Farrah Fawcett, C ndy Crawford, and Heid K um

What are some of your hobbies? Bodybu d ng, horseback riding, restor ng and furniture a so ove to p ay sports such as basketba and baseball

Name three things on your bucket list? Go Bungee Jump ng, Naked Hike Rainbow Mounta n in Peru. Go on a vo unteer nursing m ssion in Africa

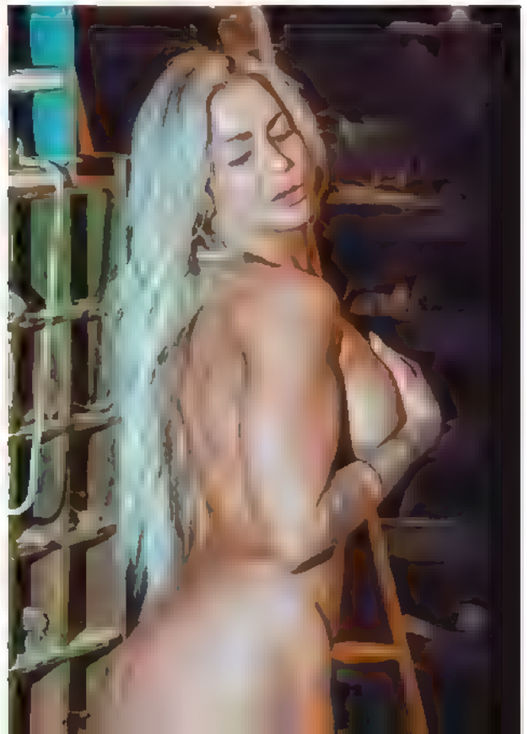
Turn-ons Sense of humor nte igence Coun try boys.

Turn-offs ealous y, disrespectfu conversa tion or tone, and pretty boys

Describe to us your perfect date. Bott e of wine, Two D x e cups Tailgate He builds the fire Watch the stars go up,.

Which world capital would you most like to visit, and why? 've wanted to go to Duba forever, the culture and topography is fasci nat ng Someth ng very appealing about the dessert, the crysta beaches and the fancy bui dings and ifesty e

What is your mantra? Too many peop e are ashamed of their bodies and not their minds.



Meet Frank Bill

a 'Working-class Writer Who Digs Trail Running, Powerlifting and Hound Dogs'

Depending on what you read about him, Frank Bill is either a literary gut punch or just a regular guy who's into martial arts and powerlifting. Either way, encountering the author is a pretty muscular experience. His writing comes at you full speed and straight on, freighted with no small amount of dis content, violence and vengeance. But despite such thrilling high intensity prose, Bill's characters are often grounded citizens who, under less duress, might've remained content to live out a quiet existence. They don't expect much from life, but when they are stripped of their livelihoods, family, dignity, they lash out in ways that can't be ignored.

This describes many of Frank Bill's characters, but in particular those of his short story The Disgruntled Americans, in which a group of brothers and cousins living in small town Indiana take up arms against the establishment. For them, it's not about the money they steal or the victims they slay. It's about sending a "wake up call. To everyone that's forgotten about independence." If America was once neatly united under the cause of shaking off the yoke of colonial rule, the modern America of The Disgruntled Americans renders a much smaller and darker rebellion that aims to shrug off the crushing influences of big business and apathetic government. "Dear Motherfuckers..." the story begins, and it only escalates from there.

My own correspondence with Frank was much more polite. He seems as grounded and reasonable as many of his characters might have wished to remain. Despite the popularity of his debut story collection Crimes in Southern Indiana and his 2013 novel Donnybrook (a movie adaptation of which is currently in development), he relayed to me a worldview largely unaffected by literary success. We spoke about his fear of boring prose, how he might've seen Donald Trump coming from a mile away and why the French love his take on the dark American underbelly.

PLAYBOY: You wrote The Disgruntled Americans two years ago—well before Donald Trump's election—yet the anger and resentment that define these characters are startlingly evocative of what many people now understand to be the president's hardcore base. Is it possible you knew Trump was going to win, while the rest of us were predicting a landslide defeat?

BILL: I had no idea that Trump was going to win. In all honesty, I try to stay away from politics and politicians. Not really my cup of tea or group of people. The media places a spin on everything; no one really knows what to believe half the time. I'm pretty much a middle of the road guy. I try to look at both sides when it comes to class and people. I listen to the people around me and their conversations. The story I wrote has many layers, one being how out of touch America is with America. One group of people believes everything is going good—they're making money, living the consumerism lifestyle—while another group of people is struggling, watching everything they've worked for being given away. I've heard this from factory workers to schoolteachers—and even from our protectors in law enforcement and the military.

The story is also about how small towns have lost their simple existence: mom-and-pop shops are sometimes run off by bigger corporations; a grocery store is replaced by a Walmart; a diner or restaurant is replaced by a fast food joint. I believe in supporting local businesses. Are they a little more expensive? Of course. But you gotta support your community. Two years ago, when I wrote The Disgruntled Americans, I felt a vibe from people. They were pretty unsettled with their jobs, the economy, immigration, fuel prices, the war on terror, racism, wages, taxes, drugs, gang violence. The list was and still is unending. And people carry those issues with them daily while trying to raise their families and live their lives.

PLAYBOY: This story goes to pains to describe why these native-born Americans commit a rather brutal act of domestic terrorism. To what degree do you want readers to sympathize with them?

BILL: You gotta have the why, otherwise it's not believable or even plausible. You gotta make your case, otherwise you're writing about violent people conducting violent acts without a purpose. One thing I tried to tap into was the vibe or the energy that was going on around me: people and their discontent. I did quite a bit of research on Timothy McVeigh, Eric Rudolph and the Weaver family from Ruby Ridge. I wanted to understand how people could commit violent and heinous acts. I also did research with law enforcement. Do I want readers to sympathize with the violence? No. Do I want readers to understand the characters' discontent with their jobs, society and daily life? Yes.

PLAYBOY: Each section opens with very deliberate language like "Cut to ..." or "Flash back to ..." as if the story might actually be under the omniscient influence of a filmmaker. What was the idea behind this?

BILL: I've written screenplays and comic books. I wanted a cinematic feel, where the action was in your face, as if you were viewing the words through a camera. But also as a writer I wanted to experiment with style and form.

"I wanted to understand how people could commit violent and heinous acts."

PLAYBOY: A review of your novel Donnybrook described it as "a literary shotgun blast to the face." How did you become interested in writing about violence?

BILL: I want my writing to be in your face. I want words. I want action. My biggest worry is writing boring prose. To me, what I write—it's no different than listening to your local news station. There's always shootings, drugs, home invasions and a host of other crimes long before the sports and weather. I grew up around stories, and within those stories there was an act of violence involved. It's just life. I also grew up hunting and training in martial arts and watching plenty of American and foreign horror, drama and action films. That all influences what I write about.

PLAYBOY: Writing physical action is difficult. How do you keep yours from sounding lame and mechanical?

BILL: I rely upon realism and body mechanics, how a person carries themselves and how they react in situations where movement is required. Boxing, martial arts and powerlifting probably help me with the visualization, then it's about putting everything into words.

PLAYBOY: I heard a story that, as a younger writer, you once tried to apply to an MFA program, but without the requisite undergraduate degree in hand. What kind of education do you think writers need?

BILL: I spoke with someone at Spalding University twice. Basically before I was published and then after I had been published. Shot down both times. To me, the best education is life experience. Get a job. Meet and work with people. Understand struggle, survival. What makes a person tick. Their vices. Get out of the house. Get your hands dirty. Feel some pain. Help other people. The simplicity of every story is the same: a beginning, a middle and an end. It's how we tell the story that differs.

PLAYBOY: In a speech you gave in France in 2013, you described waking up at four A.M. to write before going to your day job. Does having a real job inform your writing process?

BILL: Yes. I'm around people every day, and we talk about life. Our jobs, our families. What's going on in the world. The music we listen to. Sports. Movies. Dogs. Books.

PLAYBOY: So the French are into Frank Bill?

BILL: They seem to be, which is weird for me. Being a regular guy, it's odd traveling to a foreign country and encountering people who want a picture with you or to have a book signed.

"Regardless of demographics, struggle and survival are all the same actions and language."

PLAYBOY: But seriously, I've been to Paris and I've been to southern Indiana. Do you think there's a common denominator in your work that reaches across such stark cultural and geographic differences?

BILL: I believe so. Regardless of demographics, struggle and survival are all the same actions and language. Others who've lived with the issues and actions I've written about can identify with them.

PLAYBOY: Like many of your stories, The Disgruntled Americans has a rather violent ending. Are there times when you write an ending and think, No, this is too dark?

BILL: No. I think as a writer you have to push your boundaries. If you don't do that, you'll never grow or mature as a writer.

PLAYBOY: There's a video linked to your FSG author website showing you giving a literary Q&A in a body shop in Indianapolis. A different person might've come off as a hipster pretender trying that sort of thing, but I thought you looked rather comfortable. Do you find there are any difficulties balancing your rural Midwestern identity with the whole literary author thing?

BILL: No. You have to be yourself. I don't pretend to be something that I'm not. I'm a working class writer who digs trail running, powerlifting and hound dogs. I love my wife and parents, and I'm thankful for the rich upbringing and morals they offered me. I don't carry the weight of the world on my shoulders, but I do write about struggling and surviving in the world.

THE BEAUTIFUL

Kinky Kazumi

MUA Taylor

VANS
OFF THE WALL
HASSAN

Happy to have you feature on Playboy! Can you give us a bit of a background on your career as a model and where it all started? Growing up as an Asian American in Southern California, I was really into the import model scene, especially after The Fast and Furious. I dreamed about posing in front of a car and signing calendars. My first "shoot" was me helping a friend's streetwear brand take off when I was about 16. I'd say along the way I pivoted and became a fetish/kink/boudoir model. I love feeling sexy and creating titillating images. I love men and making them feel good.

What are some of your best career highlights so far? You mean, besides getting on the cover of Playboy?! I've always wanted to be in a physical print. I just recently got onto Maxim Australia as well. Haha, I briefly ran for Miss Philippines a few years ago. To even be considered for that was and is such a big deal to me. I'm also an Onlyfans creator and have generated over 3 million USD in sales.

Social media is a very powerful tool, given your massive following, what are some of the challenges you face when it comes to marketing your brand and maintaining a solid following? As an adult content creator, I face frequent censorship and shadow banning. I'm on my 7th Instagram account. I'm on my 13th TikTok. You can't kill me, I keep coming back stronger. I've been a good girl on my social media lately, so hopefully these platforms stick for me! My goal right now is to hold onto a sense of notoriety and longevity so that my supporters can always find me.

Can you give us breakdown of a typical day in the life of a glamourous model on set? I wake up around 7am, and hit the gym hard. Then I get my makeup and hair done, and I'm off to do my scene! Lately it's becoming so social for me because it feels like I just get to see my friends all day! After all is said and done, I'll dearly binge watch something on Netflix next to some Thai food. After work, I'm kind of a homebody. I've been watching more anime and going outside a little less, so I think I'm becoming an adult! Haha.

What are some of the biggest misconceptions people have about what you do? People think that all I have to do is show up. Be cute. But they don't see the early days, long nights, the customer service and marketing that actually goes into everything. It's easy to write me off as some bimbo, but everything you see about me is on purpose and meant to create discussion. I was a marketing executive prior to being in adult entertainment and a lot of that has really helped me explode in a lot of ways others don't get to see.

Now we know there are some pretty perks that come with being a beautiful woman, what would say are your favourite ones? My favorite perk is that I feel validated everywhere I go. I'm very open about how I've gotten surgeries to feel sexier. I would say people were always kind to me, but now I have the courage to say yes to certain opportunities I wouldn't have done when I was a little less confident. I feel good about myself, and I feel like that energy attracts better energy around me.

Given that you're a stunning woman who undoubtedly gets a lot of attention, what are some of the nicest things men have done to try and get your attention? I remember during COVID, I was so sad about lockdown. My partner at the time turned our little apartment into a fake club and restaurant. Our roommates were the fake waiters and bartenders and we pretended like things were normal for a second. It was so sweet and I felt really seen in that moment.

What makes you feel absolutely sexy? I feel sexy in nice lingerie, all dolled up. I love male attention when given respectfully. I love to turn men on. I feel sexy knowing you think I'm sexy.

3 things that you can't go a day without? I can't go without memes, carbs, and an orgasm.

Anything exciting we should be on the lookout for coming through this year from you? I'm gonna become a household name. You'll see me around. I'm looking to branch outside of my adult entertainment career and get onto more safe for work platforms, like podcasts and streaming! I've also been collaborating with some amazing performers (since this is Australia, I love working with Angela White!)

Where can our readers find out more about you and stay updated with your current events and adventures? I love to build personal connections on my onlyfans, @kazumisworld.

Thank you so much for sitting down with us and letting us get to know you! Any last words for our readers out there? Why can't sluts change the world?

INDEPENDENT
VANS
OFF THE WALL

Playboy Fiction

The Domestic Lives of Super-heroes

Pete's wife can read minds...it's hard for him to stay out of trouble

BY **JOHN HORNOR JACOBS**

PHOTO BY **ZAIDI RAZAK/ SHUTTERSTOCK**

"If you could have any superpower," she says, resting her hand on his chest and curling his chest hair, "what would it be?" She's a journalist through and through, Pete thinks. Even in bed. All the times before when they had played this game, it was as a prelude to another bout, another frenzied round of lovemaking. She'd grab his cock and he'd say, "Always be hard," in hopes of hardening.

But today, on the pallet of sheets and blankets they made on the floor of the one safe and shielded room in the universe, he says, "If I could have any power, it would be to take away superpowers."

"What, like steal them?" she says.

"No. Take them away. Forever." From where he rests, spent, he looks at the blank face of the ceiling, its dull black surface made of alloys and elements he cannot even begin to fathom. A bower constructed of alien material to hide a wife's private hours, her secret thoughts—and deeds. "Create a world where all men are equal," he says. He doesn't mean for it to come out sullen.

"Men?" She removes her hand from his chest and stands, nude. "Is this about Chris?" She looks around, a reflexive habit, checking to see if anyone is watching. Outside of the "blackbox," it is possible. Her husband, Chris, the leader of the League of Heroes, can hear any heartbeat anywhere in the world, peer through walls, see through flesh. He can translocate—can travel anywhere—almost as fast as thought. But not in the blackbox. It is shielded. Liza insisted on it when they moved in. She needed her privacy, her sanctuary.

Pete rises with her, pulls on jeans and buckles his belt. He slips on worn loafers and stands before her, shirtless. He's not heavily muscled or especially handsome. His body has a compactness, a dense angularity that hers does not, even though he stands no taller than she does. She is foam and he is wood. She captures but cannot hold him.

He buttons his shirt, taking his time to make sure he gets each one. It's a white shirt, rumpled slightly from their first embrace, its sharp lines and starched collar softened from the heat of their coupling—in the act, moisture sloughed off into the air to dampen everything contained in the blackbox. Condensation beads on the metal walls.

His dressing angers her. In their previous trysts he'd lounged about unclothed, watching her dress. She'd liked that, he thought, his unabashed nakedness. She enjoyed his willingness to be vulnerable in a way he sensed but could not explain. Once before, after having sex, she'd dressed, put on her pumps and then placed her heel on his privates. A light pressure intimating more. The sentiment was clear. She could unman him, destroy him. Pete simply watched her, giving nothing back, his head cradled on crossed arms, his red chest and pubic hair blazing, and smiled at the sensation of cold leather on his most assailable part.

But today she's angry. "This thing between us," she says. "It's just a thing. It's not for real. I will never leave Chris."

Pete looks at Liza, the soft roundness of her face, her long neck. He closes his eyes. A sweat drop had hung from the tip of his nose as he crashed into her open body, falling in the hollow of her throat as he came. It was her hair that first drew him. Long, black. A stark contrast to his red. Lustrous, as the television commercials said. He'd imagined how it might fall toward the small of her back. How it would move.

"I don't want you to leave Chris," Pete says, observing her face. "The Scourge is still out there. The world needs Chris—the world needs the Blade—and he doesn't need to be distracted by you." He turns to go. "Or me." He pats his pockets, checking to see if he has all his things: phone, wallet, keys. The fastidiousness of adultery. "Show me the leaking faucet, Liza," he says. "You know, the reason I'm here? I'll take care of it before I go."

They call it Hind Park, where the League of Heroes make their homes, keep their families safe. He doesn't think on Hind Park much—tries not to think on it—or the fact that he is his wife Vivian's greatest weakness. Sometimes he misses his parents, and his home of North Carolina: baseball games, barbecues at the park, kayaking the Nantahala and Chattooga, hiking the Appalachian Trail. The Scourge took that life, that history, away from Pete—his parents, his brothers and sister, all gone, targeted one by one, held for ransom and then killed. The League worked hard to save them but for all its extranatural power, for all its near godlike technology, was stymied at every turn. The Scourge outmaneuvered and overmastered them.

Pete doesn't know where exactly Hind Park is, and he's been here for seven years now. Abstractly, he understands he is here to keep the world safe from the Scourge and his minions, so his wife in her official League persona of Mesmera is not compromised. For those with great power, love is vulnerability. More intimately, he knows Hind Park as home now. It feels like Michigan, maybe, judging by the blueberries at the edges of Miller's Field, or the copse of maple and beech trees standing like sentinels beyond, at the foot

They call him Rock fall. He can manipulate any mineral to his will.

of the Wall. The winters are cold and bring heavy snow, just last December Sylvester Childress in mere seconds raised his hands and grimaced, shaping the earth into a hill for sledding. Springs are temperate and the summers are mild. Had Pete a better mind, more suited to science, he might be able to discern his location by the movement of the stars. But his hands are rough and suited for woodwork and maintenance. And, most recently, the care of children.

It's fall now and Pete walks down Arbor Lane toward the market square. The oaks have turned yellow and orange and begun giving up their leaves. Acorns crunch under his feet. There's a store at the nexus of streets, a grocery. A library and beyond, protruding from the Wall, the school. If you ignored the electric face of the Wall and the air defense missile turrets and oscillating radar antennae, it could be any town in America. The houses are large and well appointed, midcentury modern, colonial, Tudor. Each has a wide expanse of lawn, manicured gardens. Swimming pools and Jacuzzis to unwind in after long days of airborne combat and crime quashing in the cities. Of the hundred homes, most are empty.

In the square, a soldier in civilian garb unloads boxes from a refrigerated truck. When Pete and Vivian first moved to Hind Park, soldiers were everywhere, but the uniforms and guns bothered the community's kids, and so they changed protocol.

Pete trots up and pitches in, placing boxes of pork chops and fish fillets, oranges and heads of lettuce, crates of milk and juice, on the dolly. They go inside. The market is empty, bright fluorescent lights shining on full blast above untended rows of canned goods and other groceries. He doesn't know the soldier, but it doesn't matter. They cart the frozen goods to the meat freezers.

"I've got this," Pete says to the soldier, waving him off. "Something for me to do."

The soldier chuckles. "You're married to one of the League, huh? Which one?"

Pete shrugs. "Mesmera."

The soldier gives a faux shiver. "Holy smokes. You must be a saint. If my wife could read my thoughts, there'd be hell to pay."

Pete says, "It keeps me honest." He pulls out his phone and sends a group text: Meat delivery is here. Nice chops. Some salmon. Lemme know what you want and I'll have it wrapped and waiting for you at the market. A few League responses return immediately. Salmon! from Beth. Any steaks left from Sunday, bro? Chris sends. Brandi Childress responds: Six chops and some brats 4 kids, please! And can you walk M&M home for me? We'll be back at 4.

He answers each, dutifully, staring at the glowing face of his phone. When he looks up, the soldier has returned to the truck. Pete spends some time packaging and labeling the meat orders and placing them in a glass-front cooler. When all are in place, he collects the chops and spinach for his family's evening meal, bags them, claims a potted orchid—a white phalaenopsis—and wanders back out into the street. He checks his phone again for the time.

At the school, he sits on a bench and waits. There are two parts to the school in Hind Park: the section extending outside the Wall for kids who have not yet "bloomed," or shown extranatural abilities, and the inner area for the rest of them.

Pete's son, Hank, barrels out of the school's front door, whooping and swinging his backpack. A good sign—like his mother, Hank is prone to dark moods. Vivian tells Pete that their son exhibits telepathic hallmarks. Precognition, empathic senses, second sight. He'll be moving to school inside the Wall soon. Bryce and Lizzie follow their older brother. The eight year old twins have a complicated relationship; it's thought that they share a consciousness. To what end, what powers, Pete could not say.

He ruffles Hank's hair and scoops up the twins and swings them about.

"You've been with Mrs. Blade," Lizzie says.

"She's pretty," Bryce says.

"That she is," Pete says. He doesn't bother correcting them on her last name. "How was school?"

"We won," they say together.

"The coding competition?"

"Yes. It was simple," they say.

"One voice at a time, kiddos," Pete says.

"It was an app that took in information and wrote to a database," Lizzie says. Bryce's mouth moves sympathetically.

"Hey! That'll be handy," Pete says. He waves to Marcus and Mykaela, Brandi and Sylvester Childress's kids. Mykaela runs to Pete in the adorable, ungainly manner children have. Marcus strolls over, giving Pete a high five. He smiles and the younger kids join hands. "You guys have everything?" Pete asks. "Ell ee tee ess gee oh."

They accompany the Childress kids to their house. Sylvester and Brandi aren't home yet, so Pete leads them inside. There are no locked doors in Hind Park. Pete makes peanut butter and jelly on crackers for a snack. Even though the leaves are changing, it's warm enough to swim, so the kids put on suits and jump in. Marcus is 13 and can breathe underwater and create riptides, so Pete is content to leave the kids long enough to find a suit. He moves through their house, up the stairs on thick carpet, down silent halls. He enters Sylvester and Brandi's bedroom and stops, look

ing at the bed. Then he enters the walk-in closet and opens drawers until he finds a swimsuit. He strips and changes and returns downstairs, his clothes neatly folded under his arm. Using the long pool skimmer, he removes the elm leaves from the surface of the water before jumping in. Pete scores the twins' dives—7.2, 7.8, 8.3—tosses Hank into the air to squeals of laughter and wrestles with Marcus underwater until he has to tap out for breath.

Pete leans into the pool's wall, arms outstretched, watching the children splash, when Sylvester and Brandi show up, smiling.

"Hey, Pete!" Brandi says. "Thanks for getting the kids."

"No problem. Didn't have much else to do."

"Uh, man, you in your underwear?" Sylvester asks.

Pete shrugs. "Nope. I borrowed some of your trunks." He looks down at his water-distorted waistline. "Little big on me, though."

Sylvester looks puzzled and glances at Brandi. Sylvester's thick ropey muscles cord his arms, heavy neck and shoulders. They call him Rockfall, and Vivian told Pete that when he was given that call sign, he shrugged and said, "Sounds about right." He can manipulate any mineral to his will.

A look passes between husband and wife and there's some irritation on Brandi's part, Pete is sure.

"I put the chops and brats in the fridge," Pete says. Sylvester goes inside. Brandi follows her husband but returns in minutes wearing a one-piece that flatters her muscular physique. She's carrying three beers and places one near Pete's head before lowering herself into the pool near him.

"You're pushing it," she says. "Sylvester is very touchy about his stuff. Too many brothers and sisters."

Pete takes a long swallow. "Ahh. I was an only child," he says. "It was an open landscape with me a lone figure. A Heathcliff on the open plain."

"It's the moors, Pete. If you're a landscape, it's not an open plain," she says. "That's for damn sure. More like a cow pasture, you're so full of shit."

"Me?" Pete says. He raises his eyebrows, smiles and takes a pull from his beer.

He sweeps his hands along her thighs and nestles into her backside.

"I've read your dossier," Brandi says. "You've got brothers and a sister."

"I have no brothers and sisters now," Pete says.

She has something on the tip of her tongue but reconsiders, closes her mouth and spreads out one of her arms and sinks down, wetting her hair, her breasts peeking above the surface. No one talks about the losses, the failures.

Pete places one wet finger on her hand. There was nothing there, nothing in the touch. Except for one night years ago, a Christmas night, when everyone had gathered at Greason's house for eggnog and drinks. Vivian was called away to the command center; later he would learn the Scourge had found his parents only hours before. Christmas carols droned on until Beth Meyer, at her wits' end, cried "No more Burl Ives!" and hijacked the stereo. "Let's get this party started," she said, and went to kiss her wife as Al Green began to play. Everyone laughed. Sylvester and Greason chatted in the kitchen with the Guerins, and Brandi, hips swaying, had taken Pete's hand and tugged him into dance. He had had enough scotch to be extremely conscious of her body, the heat pouring from her. The heat was mirrored in him. With one glance downward, she knew. She did not pull away.

But now, she withdraws her hand and stands.

"Word is, a new couple will be moving in," Brandi says. She finishes her beer and begins drinking the extra. Sylvester will have to get his own. "They're calling her Plasmacon and him Doctor Helios, which is kind of histrionic, in my opinion."

Pete smiles. "They could use a good editor. Just Helios would be fine. God of the sun. He shoot lasers or something?"

"No idea," she says. "Mesmera—I'm sorry, Pete, I mean Vivian—is inducting them now."

"So she'll be late." He sighs. "Kids?"

"Almost. She's got one in the oven."

"That's good." Pete falls silent. Brandi watches him.

"Don't get any ideas," she says.

"What are you talking about?"

"You can act like you don't know," she says. She looks inside and then back to Pete. "There's always talk at the League Hall."

"Some things never change," he says and pushes himself out of the water. "People talk. Even superheroes. Thanks for the beer. Tell Sylvester I'll bring his trunks by in the morning." He turns to the pool. "Kids!"

Pete's house is a modern colonial, the most traditional in Hind Park and the oldest. The Captain lived here, from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, before the Syndicate—the organization that gave rise to the Scourge—managed to push him into the Nth Dimension. To remind Pete of this, a portrait of the Captain stares out from above the mantel, painted by none other than J.O. Buckley. It has been appraised for more than the house. As if the house could ever be sold.

Pete showers and changes into athletic shorts and a Chapel Hill tee. At the dining room table, he helps Hank with his algebra homework. Bryce and Lizzie are better at most abstract subjects than Pete, but his son refuses to be tutored by his younger sisters—and then they play a quick game of Ping Pong in the garage. Pete's current project—a massive white-cedar canoe kit—dominates the space. There are no cars in Hind Park, so Pete cannot understand why there is a garage. However, Hind Park has streets too, so maybe at one time it was meant to be part of the world, not locked away like the Captain in the Nth Dimension. Most of the League members can fly. Greason, the League's administrator, once offered Pete a golf cart. "So, what you're giving me is a glorified wheelchair?" Pete had said. "I can get a Muggle tat too, as well. How's that?" Greason had stammered and blushed while Vivian made outraged expressions at her husband.

Pete sautes the spinach in butter and garlic and brines the chops. He makes risotto for Hank, who has a gluten issue that leads to eczema, and pesto noodles for the twins. He drinks another beer as he starts the grill. On the patio, he watches the elms and oaks shift in the dusk, follows the passing clouds lit by the sun, already past the rim of earth. He watches geese on high, flying south through blue-gray twilight skies, the halls of play of the League, and Pete's wife, but never for him. He will not be carried. Leaves fall, and one of Beth Meyer's golden retrievers barks hoarsely into the failing light. Inside, he serves the kids dinner and reads them books (though they're all very capable readers) and bundles them into bed with kisses, taking their phones and iPads as he goes.

"Will Mommy be home soon?"

"Of course," he says.

"Will you send her in to kiss us?"

"Of course I will," he says.

He picks up laundry and turns off lights. He starts a load and then pours a scotch and drinks it in bed, naked. When Vivian comes in, he sits up.

"Long day?"

She kisses him and wrinkles her nose at the smell of scotch. "Yes. New couple. Greason and I had to induct them. They're moving three houses down, in that monstrous old Tudor."

"So I heard from Sylvester and Brandi," he says. "Did you eat?"

"I had a smoothie."

She strips and he watches her. Vivian, the daughter of a doctor and the granddaughter of an Episcopal priest, a descendant of Puritans come to America for religious freedom. An air of aristocracy hangs about her, from her fine, patrician nose to her delicate jaw. There's an abundance to her, the lush curve of hip, the elegant arms, expressive hands. They met at college and it was Pete who discovered the talents of levitation, telepathy and mesmerism that she had been hiding. Pete who pushed her to contact the League. He had fallen underneath her abilities, he had succumbed, but never enough to not understand what was happening. She was what made him special; everything in her was rebounded by Pete, a sounding board, a mirror. Everything extraordinary about Vivian was matched by everything ordinary about Pete.

When she gets into bed, he sweeps his hands along her thighs and nestles into her backside.

Vivian says, "No, Pete. I'm so tired."

"Of course, hon."

"Don't be mad."

"I'm not. You've got a lot on your plate."

"You've got your hands full here too. The kids? How are they?"

"I told them you'd give them kisses when you got in."

"I did," she says. "I'm not that absent."

"They're good. Lizzie and Bryce won their coding competition." He pauses. "Do you want to read me? See how my day went?" There are two intimacies offered here—the second comes with so much more weight.

She turns in the circle of his arms and touches his face, his mouth. Her elegant, aristocratic fingers trace the flesh there. "Oh, Pete. There's so much going on and I just need sleep. The Scourge kidnapped a Belgian nuclear scientist and stole some spent plutonium rods. I've been scrying all day."

"Dirty bombs?" he says.

"Possibly." She kisses him. The comfort of the familiar reassures him and he feels as though he is falling into her. A raft lost on the sea of her body. He opens his mouth and their tongues meet. They make love without her reading him.

He forgets to tell her about the orchid before falling asleep.

In the night he wakes to the silent house, monochrome-dark and quiet. His wife snores softly, something Pete has always found charming. Outside, the radar antennae rotate constantly, sweeping the skies. The missile turrets pan and scope the heavens, ever vigilant.

He rises and goes downstairs.

Naked, Pete pads through his home in Hind Park. The world sleeps around him. He opens the door by the kitchen and enters the garage. Here is the canoe Pete has made from white cedar. Taking up a fine-grain sandpaper wrapped around a wooden block, Pete begins sanding the tapered curve of the craft. Soon he will begin staining the canoe and then seaming it with fiberglass, and he will be dressed then. But for now it is just his hands moving across the fibers of cedar, the smell of it rising to his nostrils. Sawdust nestles in his leg hair, his crotch.

There is no open water in Hind Park.

Late in the afternoon that Saturday, Pete and Vivian dress casual—he in a camp shirt, faded jeans and loafers, she in a sundress with a light sweater tied around her waist. The kids wear bathing suits, towels slung over their shoulders. The sun shines, watery yellow, and the air blows mild with a hint of winter yet to come.

The party is for the Whitmans, the new arrivals to Hind Park. Pete and Vivian walk over, she with an air of distraction, repeatedly checking her phone. To Pete's questions, she gives half answers—"Things are happening, strange extranatural readings in Prague, AI gleaned spikes in coded surveillance"—but puts the device away as they near the Klerks'.

The Klerks'—the Blade and Liza Lynne's—door stands open, and Vivian and Pete walk in without knocking, move through the foyer into the big white kitchen and place their food alongside all the other offerings, broccoli salad, fruit salad, arugula salad

with vinaigrette, potato salad, twice-baked potatoes, kale chips, bagel chips, wedges of Gouda and Brie. Dimly Pete is aware that below him, in the basement, is the blackbox, now containing only possibilities.

A blender screams from the backyard. They walk out onto the Klerks' expansive patio to be hailed by many; Pete is more popular than Vivian, and the Guerins call him over to where they're playing badminton beyond the pool. Marcus and Mykaela wave, along with Beth and June's children. The grill smokes, perfuming the air with charcoal. There are the Littlesmiths, the Childresses, and June and Beth.

"Here he is," Steve Guerin—Spitfire—says. "Hell on the court, Pete Salzburg." He tosses Pete a badminton racquet. Pete snatches it out of the air.

"I don't think it's a court," Mahrinda Guerin says. "It's a pitch. Hey, Pete." She air kisses his cheeks. A normal, just like Pete, she's one of the few spouses along with Liza who have found gainful employment with the League. Mahrinda, having been raised between Bangalore and London, speaks seven languages and spends her days translating intelligence and acting as a communication liaison. She is not very good at badminton.

Chris appears before Pete with a displacement of air, wearing an apron. "Here, bro," he says and hands Pete a red Solo cup brimming with light green froth. "Too much tequila?" The Blade metabolizes alcohol differently than regular humans. Pete swallows some of the mixture. "You're right on the money, Chris," Pete says. Chris smiles and translocates back to the bar.

Brandi and Pete play the Guerins in a badminton match, sipping from their margaritas between points. In the air above the house a quartet of older kids plays an aggressive game of tag, occasionally punctuated by adults rising to intercede when tempers flare. Pete finishes his drink and walks over to where Liza stands near a tall blonde woman and an even taller man. The woman's belly bulges beneath her form-fitting dress.

Pete kisses Liza on the cheek, a familiarity allowed close friends. As hostess, Liza feels a pressing need to be everywhere at once and all things to all guests. It takes only a glance for Pete to know she's in a heightened state of politeness and formality. An empty drink or a bare plate is a fire to be extinguished. Two unintroduced guests, a travesty. "Pete, this is Dr. Jeff Whitman and his wife, Georgiana." Pete shakes hands with them both and looks over the taller man, wondering why his call sign is Doctor Helios.

"Hey, that's great, Doc. I think I've got a rash developing. Could you take a look?" Pete says.

Liza appears outraged, while Georgiana and Jeff laugh.

"Not exactly that kind of doctor. More along the lines of particle physics," Jeff says.

"Pete is our resident comedian and handyman," Liza says.

"That's my call sign," Pete adds. He spreads his hands as if outlining a vaudeville marquee. "The Handyman."

Liza's face darkens.

"Well, I'm Doctor Helios," Jeff says, spreading his hands in the same manner as Pete. "Though I thought prepending the call sign with 'Doctor' a bit much."

Chris appears beside them. "But there's Hellion, and Hermiac—that guy is totally fucked up—plus Hesperos and Hecate and a whole slew of similar-sounding call signs. You need brand compartmentalization."

Pete turns to Georgiana and says, "And you are—?"

"Pregnant, obviously," she responds.

Pete, caught off guard, stammers. The Whitmans, and especially Liza, laugh at his predicament. Chris gives a yelp—"Burgers!"—and disappears again.

"Your call sign is Plasmacoil? I don't know if I understand that."

Georgiana puts her hands on her stomach. She's a titan of a woman, towering and expansive. Her eyes are large for her face and her mouth is wide and generous. Pete cannot help but appraise her body. She's athletic and muscled, but her frame does not exhibit her strength in outward and coarse ways as with Brandi—biceps, triceps, quads, glutes, all bunched up and massive—nor can he see her reflected in the abundance of Vivian. She is unlike any woman he's ever encountered.

"We'll have to stay busy," Georgiana says, glancing at Jeff. She looks back to Pete as if to evaluate his true intentions. "This is easier when I'm pregnant," she says. She draws her palms away from her stomach, pulling threads and ribbons of pure energy. The air begins to crackle. In her hands she holds a pulsing ball of plasma, and within it Pete imagines he sees the electric ghost of an embryo. Georgiana rises into the air, just a few feet, her blonde hair splayed around her as if suspended underwater.

"I think I see," Pete says. Looking at her, Pete knows nothing is promised—not one day, not one life. But here, contained in this crackling electric being, he can see mapless territories of love and pleasure. Love and pleasure enough for him too, maybe. Guilt had died in him when his parents and family died—a little spark, snuffed out. He had not missed it. But in Georgiana, the vastness of her body—more than her body, truly, for she seems limitless—he senses a counterweight to the empty part of himself. If he could gain her, he would swell, grow. The diminution would cease.

She's a titan of a woman, towering and expansive. Eyes large; mouth generous.

Jeff laughs. "She has that effect on me too," he says. "She has that effect on everyone."

"Pete," Liza says, placing a hand on his elbow. "Can I talk to you for a sec?"

Pete looks at Jeff and Georgiana apologetically. "Pleasure to meet you both." He lets Liza draw him away.

In the kitchen, she says, "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Liza, this is absurd. You introduced me to them. What do you think I was doing?"

"I'm not an idiot," she says. She stops herself and looks out onto the patio. Chris is simultaneously grilling burgers, blending a margarita and tossing a Frisbee with the older children.

"He's going to burn the burgers," Pete says. "Maybe I should—"

"Shut up, Pete. Chris never fails at anything," she says.

It takes a moment to restrain himself, but Pete does not mention his parents.

"Maybe we should discuss this in the blackbox," Pete says. He places his hand on her hip. She allows it to remain for only a moment.

"Not now," Liza says. Something in her hardens. "Not ever again."

"All right," he says, smiling. "We can talk about this later."

"Never," she says, her expression awful.

Pete walks back out onto the patio, surprised to find many faces already turned toward him. Chris stands still at the grill, burning the burgers, his infallible and penetrating awareness fully upon Pete. At the edges of his perception, Pete senses Vivian probing, a minnow wriggling into the net of his consciousness. The children quiet in their play—the pool stills, the teenagers wheeling in the arteries of air cease their movement and hover.

A keening sound begins, arcing across the vault of sky. A siren. Phones begin chirping, issuing alarms. Chris's gaze lingers on Pete before he takes out his phone and disappears. The spatula falls to the ground.

The Scourge, again. This is what Hind Park was built for. Beth and June lift into the air, yelling at their kids to stay with the adults.

Vivian appears before him. "I—," she begins and stops herself. "Get the kids home," she says. "Helios and Plasmacoil, you can be more help here than out there. You haven't had time—"

Jeff says, "Understood." He takes Georgiana's hand and leads her out to the front of the Klerks' house, in the street. His skin becomes mottled, emanating light. His clothes combust and fall away. He rises above the treeline, a newborn star. Georgiana conjures a plasma ball from her womb and carries it before her. "Come on, kids!"

"I'll hang back too," Brandi says to Vivian. "A full League member should stay."

Vivian nods, not looking at Pete. "Good. Guard the Park."

Steve Guerin gives the rallying cry of the League—"All as one!"—beckoning the flightless members to come close enough to touch. They converge, dropping cups and plates where they stand on the lush grass of Chris and Liza's backyard. As one, they flash and disappear. Teens descend from the sky and gather up their younger siblings and usher them home.

Pete watches his wife rise into the air and arc away, her hair and clothes rippling with the speed of her exit. He stands on the lawn, among the litter of false suburbia, and begins picking up plates and cups. He takes the burgers off the grill and closes it. He stands there, charcoal smoke curling around the rim, burning his eyes, and stares toward the Wall, where the radar and turrets seem to whirr and turn ever faster.

"Come on, Pete," Brandi says. "The kids will need us."

He turns to gather his children, the twins and Hank. Marcus and Mykaela have them waiting and ready to go home. Pete enters Chris's house and begins to call out for Liza, but Brandi places her hand on his arm.

"Haven't you done enough?" Brandi says.

"Enough—"

"Goddamn you, Pete," she says. "You're a bigger threat than the Scourge."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Brandi sets her shoulders. The air around her begins to warp and distend. Her displeasure is the open door of an oven. Incendia, they call her. "Every garden needs a snake. And you're a fine one," she says. "Cloaked in helplessness and vulnerability. You think Chris or Vivian is going to be totally focused on the Scourge? When you're here at home?"

Pete laughs, but it doesn't feel right, and his children wait for him. He tries to walk away. Her grip tightens on his arm, beginning to burn, stopping his forward movement.

"It's true, then," she says. "I always thought it was a cliché. But all villains think they're the good guys."

She leaves him standing in the white kitchen, staring after her, near the banquet table of food that will never be eaten.

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Douglas KIRKLAND

Discusses Marilyn Monroe and His New Exhibit

The longtime Playboy photographer takes us behind the scenes of some of his most exciting photoshoots with iconic pop culture figures and his new exhibit, Beyond the Lens

WRITTEN BY **LIZ SUMAN**

PHOTOS BY **DOUGLAS KIRKLAND**

On a rainy November night in 1961, a young and green Canadian photographer named Douglas Kirkland found himself in a Hollywood studio with nothing but his camera, a bottle of Dom and the most famous woman in the world. The shoot, which one of Kirkland's earliest assignments, resulted in some of the most arresting images ever taken of Marilyn Monroe, who posed for Kirkland the year before she died.

The photos, which feature a giddy, sun kissed Marilyn wrapped in a white silk sheet, have endured ever since, most recently in Kirkland's new exhibit Beyond the Lens, opening tonight in Los Angeles.

The show is a tour de force retrospective of Kirkland's 50 year career, which, in addition to photographing timeless icons, from Brigitte Bardot, Elizabeth Taylor and Sophia Loren, to Leonardo DiCaprio, Michael Jackson and Andy Warhol, has included nearly a dozen film and fashion editorial assignments for PLAYBOY. Kirkland's relationship with the magazine began with a 1965 fire and ice themed pictorial of French ingenue Jeanne Moreau, "the brooding, beguiling high priestess of French cinemactresses," as the magazine described the star. Then, in 1975, Kirkland shot Margot Kidder, three years before the actress-writer-director catapulted to stardom for her depiction of Lois Lane opposite Christopher Reeve's Superman. After the shoot, Kidder described the photos, which were taken on a beach near her Malibu home, as "the prettiest ever taken of me."

Kirkland sat down with PLAYBOY in anticipation of his new show, which features photographs of Audrey Hepburn, Jack Nicholson, Sidney Poitier, Meryl Streep, Cher, Leonard DiCaprio and Kate Winslet and countless others, to talk about photographing iconic women, working for PLAYBOY at the height of the sexual revolution, and what really went down in that room with Marilyn.

Because this is PLAYBOY, and because you've photographed so many classic beauties, talk a little about what's so special about shooting women compared to other subjects.

I like all photography, but frankly and in simple terms, I am very drawn to beautiful women. If I'm sitting face to face with a beautiful woman, I'll probably be melting. That's the way I was with Marilyn, and that's the way I was with my wife, Francoise, who I met in Paris more than 50 years ago. I've had the opportunity to shoot some incredible women—Meryl Streep, Elizabeth Taylor, Angelina Jolie, Cher, Brigitte Bardot, Jeanne Moreau—as well as some men who I got along very well with: Robert De Niro, Richard Burton, Peter O'Toole. I've had the chance to work on more than 200 movies through the years, and that's how I connected with so many different people, both women and men.

How did you begin shooting for PLAYBOY?

I knew the photography director, Mark Kauffman. I worked mainly with Mark and West Coast photography editor Marilyn Grabowksi. Mark had been a photographer at Life magazine, where I had worked. When Mark got over to PLAYBOY, he invited me to come in and do some shoots. I didn't go to the extreme that some of the photographers did, but I knew beautiful women and I would respond to her and we would obviously get images that Hugh Hefner seemed to like. I went to the mansion a few times. It was quite extraordinary for me as a young man to be there and see it. And then I photographed there on a couple of occasions.

You did some of your earliest work for the magazine in the mid-1960s and the 1970s. What was it like to work for Hugh Hefner in the middle of the sexual revolution?

You know, in some ways it was strange, because I was married to Francoise, to whom I'm very happily married to this day, and here I was getting these assignments where people were comfortable removing their clothing. It was a different time. There was sexual freedom. You know, the Pill had come along. That doesn't seem like anything big today, but back then, it suddenly meant that women had control over whether they would get pregnant from having sex. It was a very free period.

> *"So there I was alone with Marilyn Monroe, in a room with a bed and white silk sheets with Frank Sinatra records playing."*

Talk about your night with Marilyn.

My night with Marilyn. It was a rainy evening in November. The year was 1961. I was a very young photographer for Look, which was a very big magazine at the time, with a circulation of eight million. The magazine wanted to do something special for its 25th anniversary, and had the idea of Marilyn. Marilyn was the superstar of all time. She was probably at the height of her career. I came out to California from Look's offices in New York. I stayed at a suite at the Chateau Marmont, and Look's editor Jack Hamilton and the magazine's bureau chief and I went to see Marilyn at her new home in Hollywood. She had been sick for a few months, and she wasn't anxious for people to know where she lived. She said people had been more or less haunting her. The first time I talked with her I felt in over my head. Here I am, a young guy from a small Canadian town of 7,000 people. I walked in, and she had only two chairs in the room. My colleagues, who were much older than me, immediately took the chairs, and so Marilyn said, "Oh, just have a seat here on the bed with me. I usually think of this as a couch," and she slapped it and more or less giggled in a very wonderful way. We sat down and she started to talk, and she made it very easy. She had seen some of my work, and we talked about the last time she had been in the magazine, what we should do for the shoot. Eventually, she said, "I know what we need. All we need is a bed with white silk sheets and Dom Perignon champagne, and I will do the rest." "And Frank Sinatra records," she added. And that was the end of our first evening.

What do you remember most about the shoot itself?

We rented a studio in Hollywood, and I had the bed and the white silk sheets and the Dom Perignon champagne and the Frank Sinatra records all lined up and working. Marilyn was a couple of hours late, which she was famous for. I started to wonder if she was even going to show up. She finally did, and she had one lady with her with some wardrobe. I started taking pictures, but it wasn't working at first because I was nervous. Then she said, "I know what we need. I need to be alone with this boy. I find it usually works better that way." So there I was alone with Marilyn Monroe in a room with a bed and white silk sheets and Frank Sinatra records playing, and not much else. We started working and the pictures immediately got really good. And that was the beginning of the evening that resulted in the pictures that were instrumental in starting my photography career in Hollywood. I was nervous, but she made it easy.

How did she respond to the photos?

We took the pictures around midnight on a Friday night and she wanted to see them the next day. I had the film processed first thing the next morning and went to see her that Saturday at 5pm. I rang her doorbell and she didn't respond. I rang it a second and third time. Suddenly Marilyn appeared in half darkness. She looked like she hadn't slept. "Come on in," she said. She looked through 60 or 70 of the pictures, and at first she didn't like anything that she saw. Then she left for a few minutes, came back, and said, "Let me look again." After she looked the second time, she fell in love with them. She started to select the ones that she liked and pointing out how great they were, which was quite a switch.

What's one of your most memorable shoots, other than Marilyn?

Elizabeth Taylor was always very important to me. She really was the person who got me started. Like with Marilyn, I came out to Los Angeles from my Look magazine home in New York to meet Elizabeth. She hadn't been photographed for almost a year, because she'd been ill after one of the failed attempts to make Cleopatra. The shoot was a great success and what led to working with many people, a list that astonishes me when I see it even to this day.

LEXA SKYE

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Photography by
Koesi Braxton Photography | @koesibraxtonphotography

Such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy! Talk to us about your career and what made you get into the industry? Thank you so much for publishing me! I have been modeling for over 10 years and started dancing about five years ago. My flame at that time had some prior industry experience and when we met I knew that I was talented enough to excel as a professional. More avenues were opened to me the more connections I made and the more I focused my time. My background is actually in Culinary and Kinesiology and I worked in corporate America until I was 25. I attribute a bit of fate to how my career as a model has transpired! I am a creative person and my current work satisfies my desires for a career as I never imagined was possible.

What is at the top of your list to achieve the most this year? I'm doing it! Personally, I would love to take some trips that are on my list including some international destinations. I would enjoy volunteering more as well as learning some new skills including photo and video editing, sailing, becoming a better scuba diver, and riding horses again.

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman? These qualities are important to me as well as necessary to be successful in this industry. It takes a lot of energy, consistency, creativity, and street smarts to do well without compromising your image. The world of this industry is pretty small, and I strongly believe that these are the attributes of a business professional, which are necessary in any field.

What would you say makes you stand out in the industry? I've come to the conclusion that my authenticity is the number one thing that has set me apart. I'm not a copycat! I am 100% true to myself in my presence as a public figure and model. My beliefs in whole-person wellness, the importance of good relationships, and putting out into the world exactly what I want to achieve are what have brought me here today.

Where do you draw most of your strength from as a professional, career woman? My strength is intrinsic. My values and standards never waver with personal development, taking care of my body, my mind, and putting myself around good people who share the same vibration and energy I do. Doing all of these things has and will ultimately elevate me.

What are some of your biggest passions? I really enjoy health and wellness, fitness and athletics have always been a large part of my life. Travel, exploration, and experiencing life in the fullest capacity!

3 ultimate deal-breakers when it comes to men? Dishonesty! I don't want to be lied to no matter the degree of the lie. It's also extremely important for me to be heard, seen for who I am, and treated accordingly with the respect that I deserve.

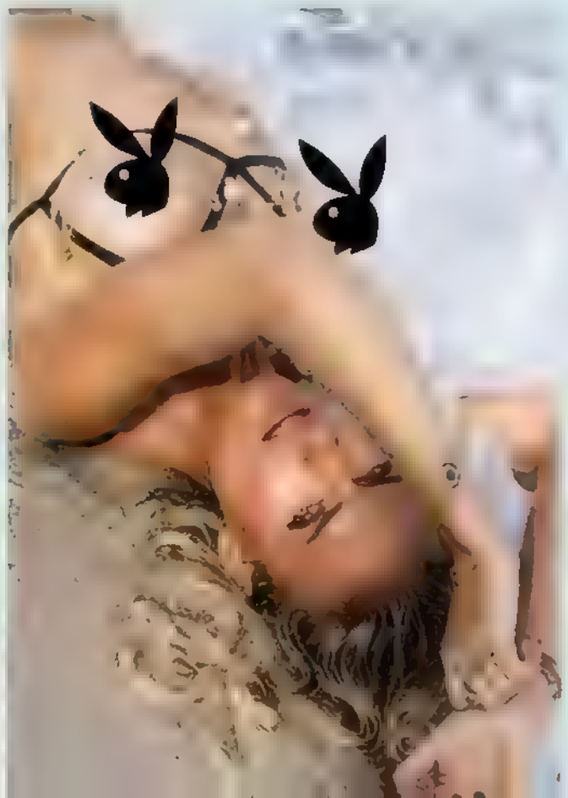
What are some of the things that attract you to a man? Charisma and confidence without being overly inflated are the hooks. Reel me in with intelligence, integrity, and empathy. It's also very important to me that a man takes his self care just as seriously as I do.

Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years? Being at the top of my field and being respected and admired in my industry are my professional goals. Personally, I would love to have toured internationally. Travel, time in nature and experiencing culture is something that has been a bit absent in my life over the last couple of years. It's truly a part of who I am. I see myself doing marine conservation dives off the Gold Coast, going on retreat to Indonesia or Santorini, and learning to sail in Ecuador!

What is the wrong way to approach you as an admirer? I am not an object because of the industry that I work in, I'm a human. If that's the way initial contact comes across, I do not even acknowledge it with my energy. Block!

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? I currently utilize Twitter and OnlyFans, @SkyeLexi, as my primary social media and exclusive platforms.

We are so happy to have gotten to know you a little bit! Any last words out there for our readers? Readers, whoever you are, never compromise yourself or your self worth in any situation. It is never worth the sacrifice of your energy. I'm looking forward to more exciting milestones. Stay tuned!



PLAYBOY

Legend-ary Artist Eric Fischl Paints Pools and Politics

For the legendary artist Eric Fischl, the personal and the political often overlap. Whether he's chronicling the sexual intricacies of suburban adolescence, documenting the sociological nuances of human behavior in the international art fair circuit, or caricaturizing world leaders with red clown noses on his iPad, often unsettling, usually beautiful and always thought provoking explorations of sex, society and politics have come to be hallmarks of Fischl's work. The artist has also never been afraid to make people feel uncomfortable, and some sense of tension always seems to be simmering subtly just below the surface of one of the pool- or ocean-set landscapes that often appear in his paintings. Fischl's most recent work is no exception. His current exhibit, Late America, explores the current political climate and what he calls "an older, wealthy class of white males that doesn't seem to have answers," as does a recent series of timely farcical caricatures of politicians from Trump to Putin to Pence, which Fischl created with nothing but a stylus and his iPad Pro.

Your original claim to fame as a painter coming up in the 1980s was a focus on sexual subversion in the suburbs. What inspired your current show, and how is and isn't it different from what you've done in the past?

That's not easy to answer, but I've done painting throughout my career that takes place around swimming pools, beaches and places of leisure, and usually, the paintings don't deliver what they look like they should be delivering. There's something that undermines the pleasure of the scene—some kind of incident that seems to go against what we believe, or that doesn't satisfy enjoyment or expectations. In that sense, these paintings are similar to ones I've done in the past. The difference is that they're focused on something that feels specific to this moment—a kind of older, wealthy class of white males that does not seem to have answers.

Speaking of wealthy white males without answers, your digital paintings of Trump and other political influencers as clowns are a departure from some of the more anonymous scenes and subjects you've painted in the past. What was the catalyst for such a direct response to the current political climate?

Those caricatures are new to me, and they're drawings that I've been doing on my iPad as a way of amusing myself in the midst of all the craziness that's been going on. There's something extreme about the time we're living in. Artists are trying to figure out ways of dealing with this moment.

You've painted a beautiful collection of watercolor nudes. Do any of the paintings in Late America involve the female form?

I have two women in two paintings, but they're not nude. They're actually the opposite—fully clothed. I paint women and I have over the course of my career painted nudes, but I don't actually think of them as nudes so much as naked. In my drawings they're more nudes, but in paintings, which are more psychological, I see them as naked.

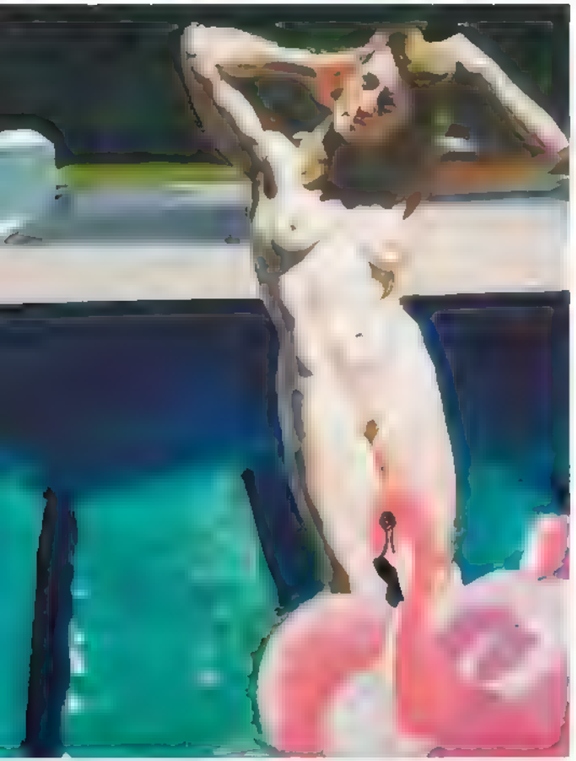
What do you see as the difference between "nude" and "naked"?

"Nude" is erotica. "Naked" is a vulnerability. Being stripped down to the absolute basic and essential. It's an exposure, so it's inherently vulnerable. I use that as part of the psychological impact of the scenes that I create. But the way I use it, it's not idealized. It's really more about vulnerability, fragility and exposure. Naked is natural.

What's next for you after Late America?

Continuing to explore the sort of themes that came up as I was making these paintings, because I don't think I've exhausted them yet. The painting I just finished is set around the same swimming pool as the one in Late America. It's basically just a pool, with some lawn furniture and then people doing things. To me it feels like they're looking at the decline of a certain kind of power and ambition. There are kids in some of the paintings, and in some cases, they need answers and an authority that's not quite asserting itself. I think the overview of my work is about people's attachments to objects and images that, in moments of stress or need, don't deliver the satisfaction or security that they require, so there's always a kind of split between what things look like and how they feel.

Trump Gang with Putin. **2017. Digital painting** Eric Fischl



Callie and the Swan Toy, 2016, (Exhibit 'Late America') Oil on linen 90x70 inches Eric Fischl

The Raft, 2007 Oil on linen, 52x60 inches Eric Fischl

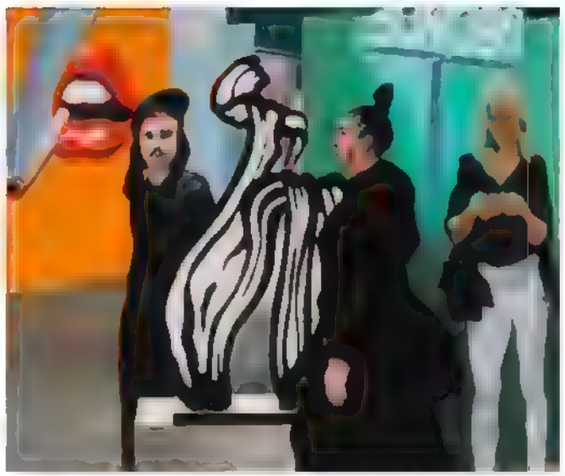
Beach Scene With Pink Hat, 2006 Oil on linen, 55x108 inches Eric Fischl

Corrida in Ronda #8, 2009 Oil on linen, 90x108 inches Eric Fischl

Study for Congress of Wits, 2006 Watercolor on paper, 69.75x165 inches Eric Fischl

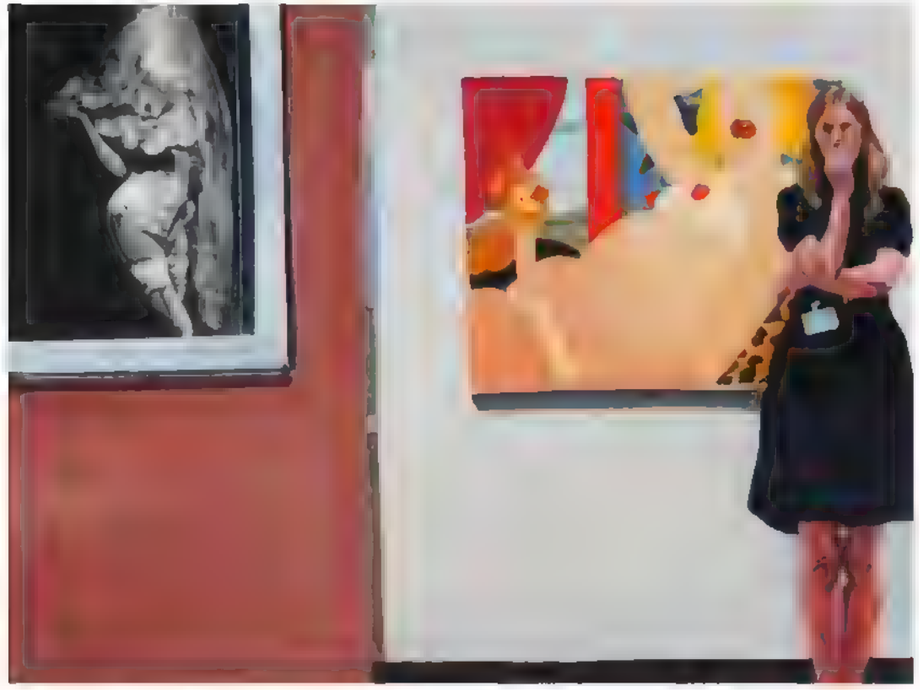
Untitled, 2004 Watercolor on paper, 60.5x40 inches Eric Fischl

The Disconnect, 2015 (Exhibit: Art Fair) Oil on linen 56x75 inches Eric Fischl

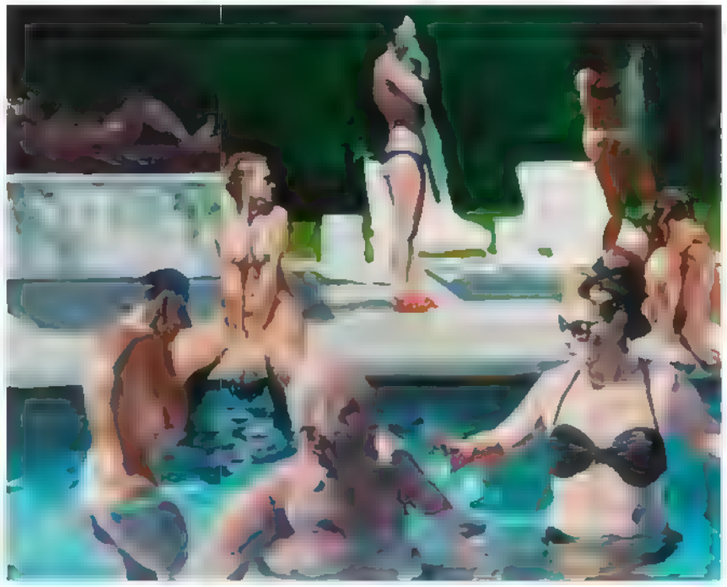


People...Puff...Poof, 2015 (Exhibit: Art Fair) Oil on linen 60x80 inches Eric Fischl

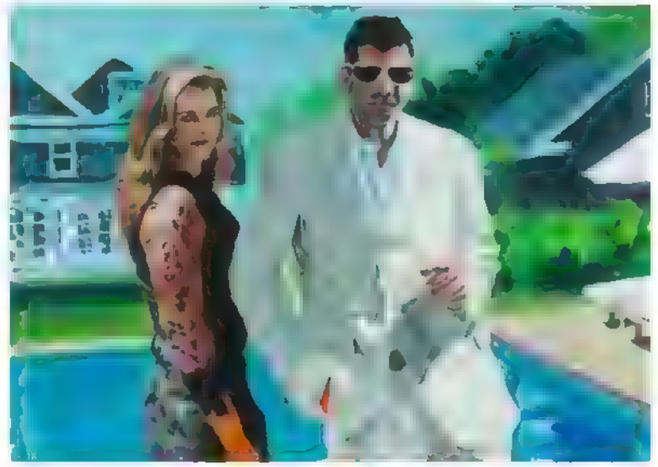
Booth #60 Shoot/Please, 2014 (Exhibit: Art Fair) Oil on linen 54x68 inches Eric Fischl



Watch, 2015 (Exhibit: Art Fair) Oil on linen 68x80 inches Eric Fischl



Growing Old in the Company of Women, 2016 (Exhibit: Late America) Oil on linen, 65x82 inches Eric Fischl



Untitled, 2017 (Exhibit: Late America) Oil on linen, 36x48 inches Eric Fischl

Noir Master Dennis Lehane Finds Drama at the Extremes

The critically acclaimed writer behind "Gone Baby Gone," "Mystic River," "Shutter Island" and more sits down with Playboy to discuss writing, relationships and personal demons

BY JOE IDE

PHOTO COURTESY HARPERCOLLINS

Dennis Lehane knows how to thrill. The best-selling author brings his trademark twists and turns to Since We Fell, his 14th and latest novel—but craftsman that he is, he never lets readers lose sight of his characters. Since We Fell tells a story that is chilling, moving and absolutely hair-raising. (Read The Sparrow, PLAYBOY's exclusive excerpt of Since We Fell), out today from HarperCollins.)

The story takes place in and around Boston—the location of many classic Lehane tales and, indeed, where the author grew up. As we spoke over the phone, I found Lehane approachable, formidable and decidedly confident, and also slightly guarded. That's not unusual for someone frequently in the spotlight, but perhaps it might be a residual effect of growing up on the mean streets of Dorchester. Back then, the Boston neighborhood had the country's highest murder rate. The experience clearly toughened him. More than that, it made him acutely aware of his environment and the people in it—ever watchful for telling insights, hostile intentions and what might be waiting around the bend. This awareness is evident in his writing. Lehane's observations are keen and perceptive, his characters full and specific. Take, for example, Rachel Childs, the main character of Since We Fell. Her journey moves her from successful journalist to housebound agoraphobe to—well, we won't spoil the story, but suffice it to say that Rachel experiences astounding and compelling character growth.

Lehane exuded a tense energy over the phone. He was patient and answered my questions thoughtfully, and I sensed that he was juggling a lot of balls inside his head. Perhaps it's because he works so hard. Lehane's resumé makes you want to go home and do something productive. To start with, there's his string of best-sellers, including Mystic River, Gone Baby Gone, The Drop, World Gone By and Shutter Island, among others. Lehane has also found time to produce and adapt his books for the big screen and to write for TV shows such as Boardwalk Empire and The Wire. Given his success, I was prepared to dislike him—but that lasted about eight seconds. He's a regular guy, just smarter and more talented than you.

PLAYBOY: While you were struggling to be an author, you had a number of jobs, including parking cars. What did you think of yourself back then? Did you think you were a regular guy with regular ambitions, or did you see yourself as somehow special?

LEHANE: I don't think I thought of myself as special. I thought of myself as an ordinary person with a slightly extraordinary ambition. What I wanted to do seemed a little bit... bizarre. I remember one thing very strongly. Until the moment that I actually saw my first book in a bookstore window, I was absolutely positive that I would never be published.

PLAYBOY: You're an acknowledged master of twists and turns but at the same time, what happens to the characters is a consequence of their own subjective reality. They act on what they believe to be true. In other words, they drive the plot instead of the other way around. Is that a fair thing to say?

LEHANE: Oh, yeah. I think that's fair. Most strong narrative comes out of the main characters' internal journeys. The internal journey is the story, and the external journey is the plot. The plot, I would say, is really just the car, and the story is the entire journey.

PLAYBOY: Rachel is deeply scarred by her experiences in Haiti, where she has to make a terrible decision. What was your thinking in putting her under extreme pressure?

LEHANE: Drama is found in extreme pressure, it's the Greek idea of in extremis. And I have a fascination with what somebody once termed the irreconcilable dilemma. If you do the right thing, a bad thing happens, and if you do the wrong thing, a good thing can happen. That sense of "damned if you do, damned if you don't," which I think is at the core of a lot of adult decisions. It's very rare that things in this world are black and white.

PLAYBOY: Rachel has a period of romantic bliss marred by, among other things, her belief that someone with her problems couldn't possibly be lovable. Do you

> *"There's an essential conflict at the heart of any intimate relationship: You ultimately can never truly 100 percent know the other person."*

think that relationships deteriorate more from forces within, or forces without?

LEHANE: That's a lot to bite off. I don't know—I think it depends upon the relationship. I do believe the old line that a relationship can survive anything but contempt.

PLAYBOY: The idea of transience recurs in Since We Fell. People and relationships appear, stay awhile and then they're gone. In one passage, you write about disassembling ourselves when we don't connect and assembling ourselves as something else. Could you talk a little about transience?

LEHANE: You know, in some ways it's a constant in life. I don't think there's too much sense of solid ground as you go through this world. In so many ways, the world is moving so much faster; everything is just changing at a blistering pace, and I think that there's an essential conflict at the heart of any intimate relationship. You ultimately can never truly 100 percent know the other person. I mean, it's hard enough for people to know themselves. There's always this sense of, Who are you in there? Who's behind those eyes? I think that's always there.

PLAYBOY: Related to that is a broader notion of change. Many things you write about—people, neighborhoods, cities, culture in general—always seem to be in process, somehow in the midst of becoming something else, for better or worse. Rachel has to continuously invent new versions of herself to survive. In a less dramatic way, are you suggesting we all have to change before circumstances do it for us?

LEHANE: I certainly think that change—often unwelcome change—is part of the package of living. Because of her affliction, Rachel begins the second part of the book believing that she can stay safely ensconced in an apartment and not engage the world. She's an agoraphobic. The book—and maybe some players in the background who we don't know yet—is saying no, that's not going to happen. You're going to get out in that world, whether you like it or not. And boy, does she get out in the world. That's the oldest trope in drama. Sort of like if you know Brody's afraid of the water in Jaws, you know exactly how that movie's going to end. If you know Jimmy Stewart's afraid of heights in Vertigo, you know how that movie's got to end. Rachel's afraid of the outdoors, so the entire book—certainly the last two thirds—is a thrusting of her out of the nest.

PLAYBOY: As the story unfolds, Rachel's entire reality is challenged. Her beliefs, her code of ethics, her relationships, her identity—all of that is turned inside and out and has to be reworked and rediscovered—and it seemed to me it was like a compressed, supercharged version of life. Is that what you intended?

LEHANE: I don't know about intended, but I do go back to this idea of extremis, or what Cormac McCarthy called "fiction of mortal event." To me drama is about people being revealed in extreme circumstances. That's the type of drama I write. there are people who do a wonderful job writing drama in which everything turns on a small moment. Books like Remains of the Day or Charming Billy come to mind. But I'm of the pressure-cooker school—that's what interests me in drama. So this is just "throw her to the wolves and see what happens." From the moment she sees something that doesn't make any sense to her onward, her life is never the same.

> *"To me, drama is about people being revealed in extreme circumstances. That's the type of drama I write. I'm of the pressure cooker school."*

PLAYBOY: In the chapter called The Sparrow, Rachel is at a low point. She's unemployed and isolated, crippled by her phobia. Then she meets Brian, and that relationship will propel her forward toward confronting her fears. Is that how we get better—through our relationships?

LEHANE: Or worse. [laughs] It really depends. In the bad type of relationship, when two people are alike in the worst ways, as opposed to the best ways, that can become very co-dependent and very destructive. But in this circumstance, yes—Rachel has met a guy who certainly seems to be supportive, empathic, patient, nonjudgmental—I mean he's the whole package. And because this is my book, and my world, of course that's the person who is going to turn out to maybe not be what he seems. He's such a good person that it should be an alarm bell.

ANNA CRYSTAL

Agency AMA modelling | @amamodeling2004

We're happy to have you feature on Playboy! Can you give us a bit of a background on your career as a model and where it all started? First and foremost, thank you for having me here. That s wonderfu fee ng to be ittle part of big magaz ne ike P ayboy. I remember myse f more than 10 years ago I was buying every issue in my country, my boyfriend never understood it but definite y ike it :) Wel yes, have a ittle co ection of you. 'm an erotic/XXX model, gym trainer who a so couch you to find your higher potentia , know sounds fancy but it's my job Since you are more curious about mode part of my ife, et's stuck with it :) I a ways was in ove in beautifu sexy woman. So won't be surpr sed that on y reach my adu t age start working for being one of them! I started my mode carrier in Europe. Prague, Hungary, Spain, France But never took it ser ous y and kept work- ng in fitness 5 years later moved to USA and my mode ng carrier became ma n th ng of my ife But sti manage time for my couch ng

Having a full schedule must make it difficult for you to get much alone time, talk to us about the top 3 must-dos to ensure you fit in some well-deserved down time? We , I don't have troub e with t me P ann ng makes it always easier and better to comp ete. 3 must-dos.. we , worthy, interesting, desirab e. That can take over everyone free mo- ment. bet it works everywhere

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman? That means ife that means your way of Life makes us stronger; we a ways go through experiences that et us grow n te igence is ike big, beaut fu diamond that hard to h de. Ambitions hope they match my opportu- nities and a ms.

What are some of the biggest misconceptions people have about what you do? That they know me. That there is reason to be int midated by me And . probab y.... That 'm rich ahahaha

What does freedom of self-expression mean to you? L fe again .) Sometimes it's hard to me be- cause can't understand how another way can be How come people imit themse ves when it's so easy to be yourse f. Only can say 'm happy 'm free to be myse f

We absolutely love your Instagram, your content is very dynamic, inspirational, and downright sexy, could you perhaps tell us what your personal experience as an influencer has been like? Thank you so much, that s so sweet of you :) 've never ca myse f inf uencer. At least nstagram doesn t let me. Ahahah But it's nice when peop e

fol ow your ife, and like it A ot of people come to me for support To be honest it's weird that they want support or advice from me seeing me only in IG. But fee ings that can be helpful for someone warm my heart. I'm not a big one but 'm the one

3 things that you can't go a day without. Hah.. ' be primit ve Shower, Coffee, phone.

What about those crazy DMs you must receive! Care to share a few funny stories regarding those? We , I have huge co ec t on of dickp cs haha, but beyond the ,oke as sa d before peop e rea y send me he p request or something they happen to become my friends. a ready have few peop e who came from DMs to ong asting friendship. We far away, never saw each other But we are so c osed and so helpful friends. Never thougnt that peop e who never saw can take it- t e part of my heart sn't it won derfu :)

Now we're sure you experience a lot of male attention on and offline, any advice you would like to give to men out there who are hoping to catch your eye the right way? Emmm have no dea how to pick up myse f so no advice I ve by my heart and intuition And sometimes u don't need to catch me ' catch you.

What is the absolute worst thing a man can do to completely put you off? Abso ute y worth.. oh it's so many ahana Don't send your friend to te me that u like me to accompany. Don't stop your car in the m dd e of the street to give me your bus ness card and run back. I won't ca you. There is nothing bad in any dea but most of the times they not working. They worst th ng is to be rude and pushy

That said, what advice would you have to give to all women out there when it comes to love and relationships? Don't try to change that you a ready accepted to take You can magica y improve but not change

Thank you so much for sitting down with us and letting us get to know you! Any last words for our readers out there? Thank you for chance to share my way Hey ove y readers :) nice to show you myse f and thank you to read my works. I hope t makes u sm e and give pleasure to your eyes, smooches xoxo

Why Won't President Biden Utter the Word 'Abortion'?

Reproductive justice advocates are pressuring the new administration to stop dancing around the topic of abortion access

BY **DANIELLE CAMPOAMOR**

Less than eight hours after Joe Biden was inaugurated as the 46th president of the United States, the administration fielded its first question regarding abortion. Owen Jensen, a reporter for Catholic TV network EWTN, asked White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki about "two big concerns for pro-life Americans"—the Hyde Amendment, which bans federal funding, such as Medicaid, from covering abortion services, and the Mexico City policy, which withholds U.S. government funding from clinics overseas that offer or make referrals for abortion care. It was an anticipatory moment for the nearly one in four women (as well as trans men and nonbinary people) who have abortions, as well as abortion providers, clinicians and advocates. It was a chance for the Biden-Harris administration to set the tone and make good to the over 81 million people who voted them into office.

And they failed.

Psaki side-stepped the question, saying the administration would have more to say on the issue before administering a disclaimer of sorts. "I will just take the opportunity to remind all of you that he is a devout Catholic and somebody who attends church regularly," she said. "He started his day attending church with his family this morning, but I don't have anything more for you on that."

The majority of people who have abortions are religious, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a pro-choice research organization. A reported 17 percent of abortion patients identify as mainline Protestant, 13 percent identify as evangelical Protestant, 24 percent identify as Catholic and 8 percent report some other religious affiliation. Catholics are just as likely to have abortions as anyone else, yet by evoking the president's faith in order to side-step a question that could have easily been answered (Biden later issued an executive order that rescinded the Mexico City policy), the Biden-Harris administration spent its first 24 hours in office reinforcing abortion stigma.

"We should absolutely expect a presidential administration, especially the Biden-Harris administration, to be willing to speak openly, honestly, affirmatively and unapologetically about the importance of abortion access, and that includes saying the word abortion," says Andrea Miller, president of the National Institute for Reproductive Health. "If you support the ability of people to make decisions about their reproductive lives, which the vast majority of people, including the voters who elected this administration, believe, you need to be willing and able to say the word abortion."

Biden and his administration do not seem to harbor that willingness though. On the 48th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the landmark Supreme Court ruling that secured access to abortion care as a constitutional right, the White House issued a statement that did not once include the word abortion. Instead, the administration chose phrases such as "reproductive health," "the right to choose" and "health outcomes." Among the many executive orders Biden signed regarding the Covid-19 crisis, absent was an order to revoke the in-person mandate for medication abortion during the pandemic, therefore allowing the federal government to continue to force people to travel to clinics in person when studies have shown they can safely receive and manage medication abortions at home. In fact, a study published on February 18 in the British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology found that a "telemedicine-hybrid model for medical abortion that includes no-test telemedicine and treatment without an ultrasound is effective, safe, acceptable and improves access to care."

> *"Abortion stigma is back and thriving in the White House, and that is very scary under a supposedly pro-choice administration."*

"When those who support abortion rights and abortion access use euphemisms and avoid talking specifically about abortion, the biggest problem is the void it creates," Miller says. "It's a void that a small but very extreme minority that is trying to eliminate abortion is ready and eager to fill with misinformation, with lies, with harassment, with violence and with policies."

Makayla Montoya, a 21-year-old living in Texas who spoke to Playboy from a parent's home after her apartment lost water, power and heat during the recent winter-storm crisis in the state, has experienced the ramifications of such a void, and how it can perpetuate stigma, shame and judgment, and make it easier for barriers to abortion care to remain. Montoya was 19 when she had her first abortion, and, given the limited amount of access to care in her state, she first visited a crisis pregnancy center.

> *There is no time to be coy, or to shroud the word abortion in euphemisms and colloquial terms to appease a loud minority.*

"At the crisis pregnancy center they showed me a bunch of little rubber babies, they gave me a onesie and were like, 'Oh my God! Congrats, you're pregnant! You must be so excited!'" Montoya says. "I was like, "Um, help me?" Montoya says she had no funds to pay for her abortion and was out of work. "I was a full-time sex worker, so I was really struggling being pregnant and being able to perform at the same time," she says. "Being pregnant and being a stripper just weren't compatible things for me at the moment." So she relied on her friends and former partner to help pay for her surgical abortion.

"I felt a lot of shame," she explains. "I just let myself be sad and upset about it because everything around me told me that that's what happens after an abortion—that you have to feel sad and shame and regret and like you lost something. It was hard. But after talking to people in my community and hearing their abortion stories and that people actually celebrated their abortions and that it was okay, I felt so much better. I don't have any of the shame or guilt anymore, but I had resources. I had people. A lot of people don't have that."

A national study in 2012 found that nearly two-thirds of people who have abortions know people who would "look down on them" if they knew they had the procedure. Another study published in January 2020 found that high levels of abortion stigma at the time a person seeks abortion services can "contribute to people's experiences of psychological distress," including internalized perceptions of stigma that can cause "long-term consequences for their mental health."

"I didn't tell my mom [about my abortion]. I didn't tell my grandparents, who I was living with at the time. I didn't tell my cousin, who I was also living with," Montoya says. "That was a hard secret to keep, but I felt like I had to because I grew up in a very Mexican-Catholic family. If you had an abortion—and people in my family did—you just didn't talk about it. It was something to be ashamed of."

"Those of us who have abortions work really hard to listen to the people in our lives who are talking about abortion access and how they talk about it to figure out whether they're safe people to talk to about our own experiences," says Renee Bracey Sherman, founder and executive director of We Testify, an organization dedicated to the leadership and representation of people who have had abortions. "One of the things we listen to is whether they can say the word abortion—whether they're sharing their values and love when they're talking about abortion. And right now, the White House isn't doing that."

Bracey Sherman started the #AskAboutAbortion hashtag and campaign during the 2016 presidential primaries to better assess which Democratic candidates truly support access to abortion. She says that for abortion storytellers, many of whom made the decision to share their abortion stories during the Trump administration's tenure, when harassment and threats to abortion patients, clinics and providers doubled, the administration's decision to avoid the word feels like a betrayal.

"I can speak for the We Testify storytellers when I say that it feels really frustrating to do the brave thing and share our stories, only for Biden to not reciprocate that by even acknowledging what we've done by saying the word abortion," she says. "Abortion stigma is back and thriving in the White House, and that is very scary under a supposedly pro-choice administration."

What makes it particularly threatening for those living in states hostile to abortion rights is the influx of anti-abortion laws being introduced at the state level now that the Supreme Court holds a conservative majority. An anti-abortion bill in Tennessee would allow men to "veto" the abortions of their partners or former partners. Republican lawmakers in Iowa introduced a bill that would allow the state to "utilize proactive targeted digital marketing using proven search engine marketing techniques" to track pregnant people seeking abortion services and target them with "specific scripting strategies to create a conversation with these pregnant women to encourage them to choose an alternative." South Carolina passed a near-total abortion ban, outlawing the procedure before most people know they're pregnant. (One day after it was signed, a federal court blocked the measure.) Republican lawmakers in Arizona want to prosecute people for homicide who have abortions. One lawmaker called it the "perfect bill" and said at a rally that the bill would not be amended.

This is why leaders in the abortion-rights space reject the idea that people working to expand abortion access can breathe a sigh of relief now that

Trump is out of office. For far too many people in this country—particularly Black, poor, young or LGBTQ people—Roe exists in name only, and anti-abortion laws are passed at the state level regardless of who occupies the White House. All* Above All, a women-of-color-led effort to restore and sustain public insurance coverage of abortion, has been a leading voice in urging the Biden administration to say the word abortion, repeal Hyde and expand access to abortion care for the most marginalized among us.

"President Biden is a compassionate leader who supports healthcare access and economic security for all people. His values align with abortion justice: He has prioritized racial equity, economic security and pandemic relief during his first 100 days in office," Silvia Henriquez, co-president of All* Above All, said in a statement emailed to Playboy. "We're urging him to use his bully pulpit to send a message about his commitment to abortion justice as a part of racial and economic justice. Equally important are the actions he takes. We're watching closely for him to follow through on his campaign promises to end the Hyde Amendment. A presidential budget without the Hyde Amendment and lifting barriers to medication abortion care fit squarely within President Biden's stated priorities of racial equity and pandemic relief."

NARAL has publicly asked Biden and those in his administration to say the word abortion via Twitter and other public platforms, and has called on the administration to repeal Hyde and highlighted the importance of talking about abortion to combat stigma. Alexis McGill Johnson, president of Planned Parenthood, spoke about the importance of saying the word abortion during a press call with leaders from organizations supporting the Blueprint for Sexual and Reproductive Health, Rights and Justice. "Frankly, we need to be unapologetic about saying what we mean: using the word abortion when that's what we're talking about," she said.

Advocates promise that these calls are only going to grow if the administration refuses to do right by the people who elected them. When six states have only one clinic that provides abortion care; when studies have shown those who are denied abortion care are more likely to live in poverty; when the country is in the throes of a public health crisis that is disproportionately impacting Black, Indigenous and people of color; and when the nation is experiencing a rising maternal mortality rate and racial injustice— all of which fall under the purview of reproductive justice—there is simply no time to dance around the issue. There is no time to be coy, or to shroud the word abortion in euphemisms and colloquial terms to appease a loud minority. It's time for the Biden administration unapologetically, whole-heartedly and without hesitation to stand up for and defend abortion access, the people who offer it and the people who seek it out.

"My job is to be 100% supportive of people who have abortions and advocate for people who have had abortions," Bracey Sherman says. "Sometimes that means calling out your friends and holding them accountable when they're causing harm."

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